



THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

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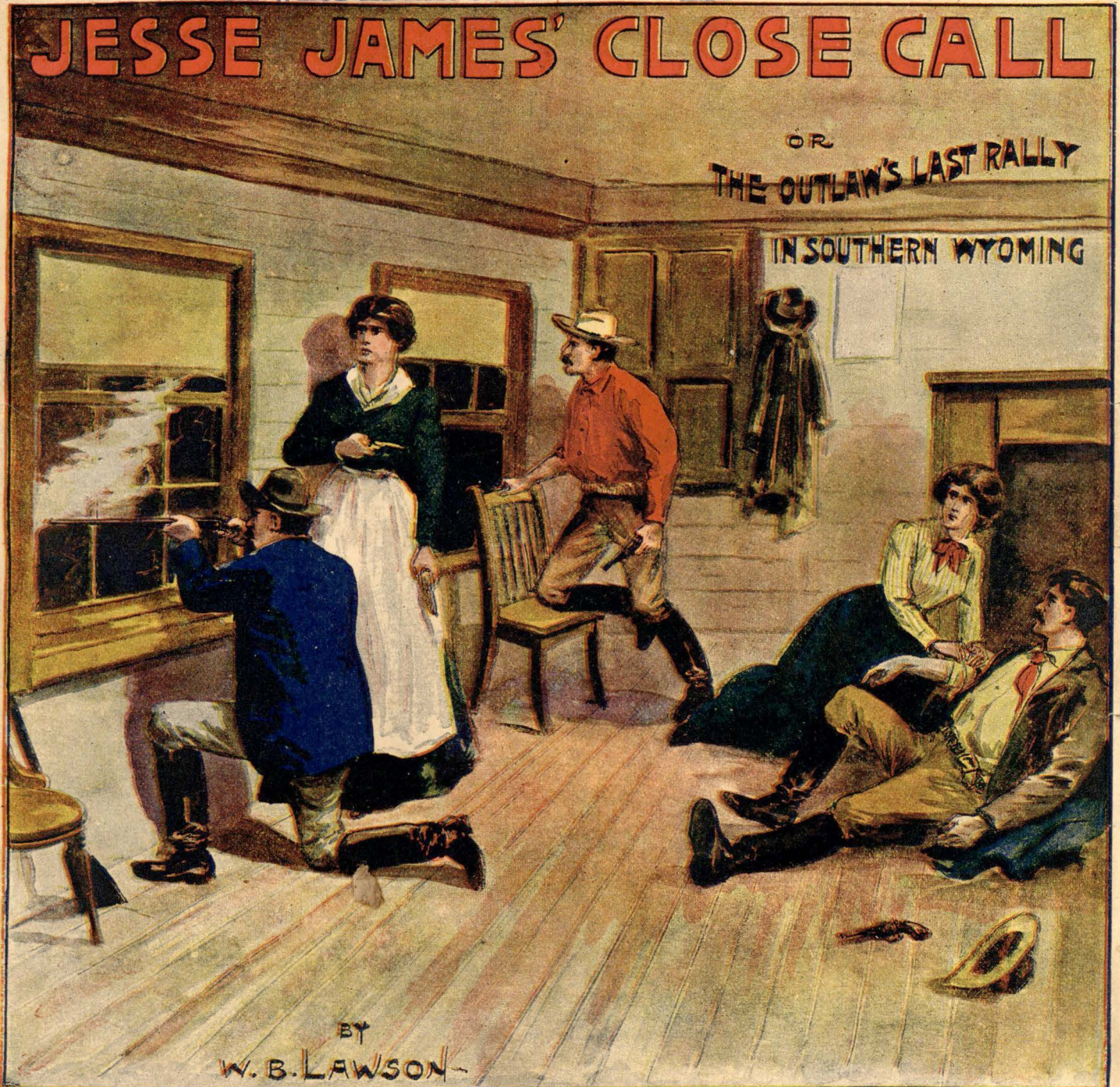
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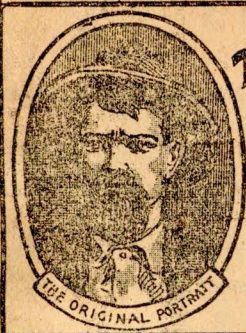
JESSE JAMES' CLOSE CALL

OR
THE OUTLAW'S LAST RALLY
IN SOUTHERN WYOMING



BY
W. B. LAWSON

THE CRACK OF JESSE'S RIFLE WAS FOLLOWED BY A YELL OF AGONY. ONE OF THE POSSE HAD MET HIS FATE.



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No. 12.

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JESSE JAMES' CLOSE CALL;

OR,

The Outlaw's Last Rally in Southern Wyoming.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

A JESSE JAMES "MONUMENT."

Underbrush, stunted trees and rocks of every description dotted the landscape, the sun had set in the West and over the whole wild picture was thrown the dark shadows of the distant "Rockies."

Flash!

Crack!

Thud!

A bullet came from somewhere and buried itself in the trunk of a tree not an inch above the crown of a soft felt hat that rested upon the head of a man propped up against the tree trunk.

A moment of silence followed the echo of the report, but the fellow did not move; then the bushes thirty feet away were parted and two young men in leather breeches, shooting jackets and wide brimmed hats crawled out into the clearing.

"Pretty good nerve, whoever he is," said one of them, softly. "He never turned a hair! I wonder if he is playing 'possum." A startled exclamation from the second man terminated the remark abruptly, and there was a simultaneous dash toward the recumbent figure.

"He's as dead as a door nail! See here, Davis! There's a bullet hole in his heart and a paper pinned over it!"

He removed a scrap of paper that was fastened to the dead man's jacket as he spoke, and held it up so they both could see it.

The words upon the paper were scrawled with a bold hand and read as follows:

"I shot this fellow at noon, October 8, 18—. He was a Pinkerton detective!"

It was signed by the most notorious outlaw in America—

James."

As the two men read it, they gazed significantly at each other and then both turned instinctively and took a sharp look at the rocks and bushes.

"That means that he is in this neighborhood," said one of them, "and if such is the case it behooves us to act cautiously."

"Shall we go through his pockets?"

"I think not! No doubt Jesse James went through them when he did this foul deed, and you know it would look suspicious if any one should see us. We must leave him as he is. We can't even bury him."

"But he is one of us, Duncan!" urged Davis, in a lower voice, "I can't leave a Pinkerton man to be food for panthers!"

The young man stepped forward as he spoke and removed the hat from the dead man's head, then deftly slipping his fingers inside of the sweat band he extracted a paper.

"It must be done! Live men are worth more than dead ones! That scoundrel, Jesse James, may have his eye on us this minute! Hello! Is it possible he overlooked a paper!" muttered the other.

"I wish I had my eye on him!" growled Davis, as he replaced the hat and opened the paper. "He must have been absent-minded this noon when he shot our brother officer here or he would never have left such a document behind him."

Once more the two men took a careful survey of the bushes; then, while Duncan stood guard with a revolver in his hand, his friend and partner, Lawrence Davis, read the contents of the paper:

To whom it may concern: The bearer of this paper is Ellsworth Barnes, of Chicago, at present in the employ of the Pinkerton agency of that city. My errand to Wyoming is to run down Jesse James, the outlaw; also to trace the whereabouts of Miss Jennie Colchester, daughter of Samuel Colchester, of Laramie City, who is supposed to have been kidnapped by the James gang in 187—, for what evil purpose no one has been able to discover. Miss Colchester was ten years old when abducted, and her father, a poor man, has no reward to offer for her rescue. If I meet with foul play, kindly mail this paper to Mr. Pinkerton, and, if possible, give my body a decent burial.

"Poor chap! I wish we could comply with his request," said Davis, as he finished, "but as you say, Duncan, the thing is impossible! It will be dark in an hour and we must look for shelter."

They turned away slowly, Davis wrapping the paper with some others in his possession and placing them all in an inner pocket of his shooting jacket.

"I've heard of that kidnapping case before," said Duncan, as they made their way through the "scrub." "I believe Mr. Pinkerton adds that to his orders about once in so often, but no one has yet been able to trace the girl.

I suppose it would be different if there had been a reward offered. Jess would have found her himself!"

"Sh! There's some one behind us!" whispered Davis, sharply, wheeling around at the same time and scanning the bushes.

"A catamount, perhaps! Let's hurry, old man! There's a farmhouse, or what passes for one, somewhere in this section, I'm almost sure."

Once more they started forward, and once more a small, wiry man who was following them, wriggled his body through the bushes like a snake, but just too far away to hear what they were saying.

He had been sleeping in a tree when the report of the pistol awoke him and, after waiting until their inspection of the dead was over, he slid down noiselessly and followed them.

"Who the devil be they?" he muttered to himself, as he moved stealthily along. "I'd hev given my pocket flask ter heve heerd what they said, but it ain't nowise likely they are detectives. Ef they wuz they'd er made more fuss at discoverin' one of Jess James' monyments."

He chuckled grimly and his face, which was covered with scars, grew as red as a lobster with the excess of his merriment, but as the detectives were just vaulting a low, zig-zag fence that outlined the yard of a tumble-down farmhouse, he was obliged to calm his mirth and move a little faster.

The place was a wide stretch of undulating country between the Big Horn River and the foothills of the Big Horn Mountains, in Wyoming, and a wilder, lonelier country could hardly be imagined.

Here and there in the hills a little prospecting had been done, and a small number of coal and iron miners had come in and formed settlements.

One settlement, Coyote Gulch, boasted a fairly well organized mining company, but the ore was owned by every man in the section, according to his own activity.

To stake off a claim, fight for it, murder the original claimant and scare out prospective ones was the first duty to be done, after which the owner had to stand guard like a watch dog and protect his treasure. A specimen of every type of desperado characteristic of the Rockies could be found in Coyote Gulch, and the three whisky saloons, two gambling-houses and various dens for other iniquities did a flourishing business.

A narrow track for ore cars was equipped with a dummy engine, which could be used for conveying metal to the crude smelting works twenty miles distant, but this was a feat which had to be done under guard, so the habit of secreting any and all precious finds was soon acquired by the natives.

Davis and Duncan were in a "case" that would carry

them to the Gulch, but, as it combined the tracking of Jesse James also, this special detail of their errand need not be mentioned until later.

When the two brave fellows reached the door of the ramshackle old farmhouse, they both took another look behind them, but the fellow who was so interested in their movements had dropped down behind the fence, and it had grown so dark that they did not notice him.

At Duncan's knock the door was opened by such a fine-looking woman that both of the detectives started back in astonishment.

Duncan, who was something of a lady's man when off duty, recovered himself instantly.

"Pardon me, madam, but we are a couple of stranded tenderfeet on the way to Coyote Gulch," he said, politely. "We left the Big Fork stage coach at noon and have been walking ever since, and now, being footsore and tired, would like to secure a night's lodgings. Can you make it convenient to put us up till morning?" He gave her many glances of admiration as he spoke, but, although the lady's eyes brightened and a slight flush rose to her cheeks, she seemed to hesitate about acceding to his request for shelter.

"If you cannot accommodate us with rooms, perhaps you can let us have a couple of horses and a man to guide us to the Gulch," said Davis, quickly. "We don't wish to intrude, but we are very tired and hungry."

A musical laugh rippled from the lady's lips, but before she replied, the detectives both noticed that she glanced sharply over her shoulder.

"Really, gentlemen," she began, finally, "I dislike to appear inhospitable, but the fact is, I have only just reached this wretched old house to-day myself, and, being without servants, I hardly know how to accommodate you."

"How about the horses, then?" asked Davis. "It is ten miles to the Gulch, I understand, and the prospect of walking there on an empty stomach is not very pleasing."

"I think possibly that might be arranged," she said, after another glance over her shoulder; then, stepping on the sill, she shut the door behind her. "I'll be honest with you, gentlemen," she began, with charming candor. "I am the wife of Jesse James and I have come to this lonely spot to join my husband. There is food enough inside and to spare, but, knowing who we are, do you still wish us to entertain you?"

To save themselves the two detectives who were seeking the life of the notorious bandit could not refrain from glancing at each other, but, without a tremor in his voice Duncan replied promptly:

"There is no reason, madam, why we should fear your husband. We are on our way to Coyote Gulch simply to

do a little prospecting, and, if your husband is kind enough to entertain us, we will not only respect his hospitality, but we will gladly pay him well for his trouble."

"Then wait! I will call him!" said the lady, raising the latch.

The next moment the heavy oak door was shut in their faces.

"Stake my oath! I don't half like this sort of thing," whispered Davis. "I can't sit at a man's table and then deliberately kill him!"

"Nonsense! You won't get the chance—to kill him, I mean! Jesse James eats with his revolver by his plate; if I am not mistaken. Besides, if we refused, it would arouse suspicion, and the chances are we'd be lassoed before we were ten feet from the building. There's no room for sentiment in this deal, old man! We are after a cold-blooded scoundrel and we must be cold-blooded!"

"We'll stick to the story we made up this morning, then," Davis answered. "And, really, the madam is a fine-looking woman and I don't mind seeing more of her. They say she is almost as good a shot as her husband."

"Yes, and Mrs. Samuels, his mother, is a sure hand at the trigger! Jess is surrounded with dead shots," muttered Duncan, softly.

Duncan felt his two pistols carefully as he spoke, and just then they both heard a step behind them.

The wiry little fellow with the scarred face had glided softly up to the door and now stood about ten feet away, watching them like a ferret under his bushy eyebrows.

"Hello! Are you Mr. James?" called Duncan, with a wink at his friend. "If you are, your wife is looking for you inside there! She wants to ask you if you are willing to board us until morning."

The little fellow made a quick movement and stood beside them; then, as it was dark under the wide eaves, he craned his neck to peer into their faces.

"He! he! Thet thar's rich! So ye took me fer Jess, did ye? I'll tell him on it, an' snakes, how he'll cuss! Me took fer Jess James! He! he! Thet thar's rich, stranger!"

He seemed so genuinely amused that the two detectives smiled, and at just that minute the door opened again and Mrs. James bade them enter.

The man who had joined them stepped in at the same time, and Duncan could see out of the corner of his eye that the fellow was "sizing up" their weapons.

The room was a sort of kitchen and dining-room combined, and was furnished with a few chairs, some shelves and a table.

There was a fire in the fireplace at one end of the room, and over this Mrs. James had some kettles swinging.

They glanced about rather uneasily at first, but there was nothing to be seen of their host, and Mrs. James bustled about getting the supper on the table and talking as gayly as though she was the happiest woman in creation.

"The loneliest spot in Wyoming, I call it," she said, with a hysterical laugh, "but I hadn't seen Jess for a month, and I had to come! Oh, won't I be glad when we get back to Missouri!"

"Are you going back to your native State?" asked Duncan, cautiously.

Mrs. James was about to reply when the scar-faced fellow whom she called "Rattlesnake Bill" spoke up, sharply:

"Yer seem mighty well posted on Jess an' his doin's, stranger! Whar'd ye come from, anyhow, if ye'll 'low ther question?"

"Who hasn't heard of Jesse James and his gang, I'd like to know?" answered Duncan, promptly. "Why, his name is a household word from the Atlantic to the Pacific! We'd be greenhorns if we hadn't heard of him!"

"Thet thar ain't sayin' wharbouts yer come from," retorted Rattlesnake Bill, grimly.

The detective was saved from replying by the sound of a heavy tramp of feet just outside of the rear door, which the detectives could guess led to the outbuildings.

A roar of hearty laughter was followed by a curse; then some one kicked the panels and the door flew open.

Jesse James and his brother Frank entered, with two brutal-looking fellows behind them.

CHAPTER II.

A GAME OF POKER.

The two detectives felt anything but comfortable when they saw the famous outlaw's steely blue eyes upon them, but they were playing a game that admitted of no indecision, so both returned the stare with interest.

Frank James and the other two members of the notorious gang were interesting characters, but the bandit king fascinated through his cruelty, and it was upon him that the two detectives now centered their attention.

He was a man of powerful build, with a close-cropped reddish beard, and when in a jovial humor his face was very attractive.

He was in the middle of a conversation with his brother and friends and finished it coolly before acknowledging the presence of strangers.

"I'll have Fleetwind fed right away, so she'll be ready on time. You'd better ride the black horse, Frank, and Mustang Mike can ride the broncho. There's hot work on hand, but those three critters are equal to it. There ain't a sheriff in Wyoming that can keep Fleetwind in

sight when she once gets a bullet's length ahead of them!"

"Jess, here's guests!" spoke up Mrs. James a minute. "They're on their way to Coyote Gulch some prospecting."

"Prospecting for what?" asked Jesse James, stepping forward, with surprising good nature and holding out his hand to the detectives; then he added: "There's nothing at the Gulch but graveyards and poor white men."

"That's strange! I thought there were no end-tractions," laughed Duncan. "I was told that one miner had struck it rich, and what's the matter with the gambling-houses?"

"We can accommodate you right here, if that's all right," replied the outlaw. Then he turned to his wife and said, pleasantly: "Come, my dear! What have you got for supper?"

He went over to her a minute later and helped lift a heavy kettle from the fire.

The detectives looked on in wonder at this picture of domestic felicity and eyed the lady closely as they sat themselves at the table in answer to her summons.

They were about beginning to envy the outlaw's charming wife when a door leading to an upper room opened.

A young girl stood upon the threshold and, just as the two young men had hard work to contain their surprise.

She had golden hair and hazel eyes, and her face was as plump and graceful as a wood nymph.

"Hello, Jean!" said Jesse James, in a milder voice than he had used before. "Come right in, little girl; these chaps won't eat you! Set a chair for her right beside the two of 'em, dear, and if either of 'em dares to lay eyes at her, I'll blow his head off!"

He drew a revolver from his belt as he spoke and laid it upon the table, and, in spite of his laughter, the detectives noted the tone of warning.

Duncan was right. Jesse James did not mean that any one should "get a bead on him," and even protect himself from his enemies while he was eating.

The grim horror of the situation dampened the spirits of the two young men somewhat, but, as the beautiful girl seated herself between them, Duncan would have braved more than the outlaw's pistol for a glance under her long lashes. He began chatting with her at once, while Davis engaged his host in a conversation which soon took the form of a sort of clever cross-questioning which kept the detective continually on his mettle.

As the meal progressed, it was plainly to be seen that the outlaw's threat meant nothing and that he had no

made it to disguise his real reason for drawing his weapon.

He was as suspicious of his guests as it was possible for a man to be, and once he insisted on every one rising, so that the table could be moved out of range of the windows.

By the time the meal was over he had succeeded in making the detectives very uncomfortable, for his air of distrust grew more noticeable every minute. Question after question as to their business in the West had been asked and answered, and when Duncan gave an assumed name and address glibly the outlaw wrote it upon a piece of paper and slipped it into his pocket.

"I reckon you might as well stay here all night, gentlemen," he said, finally, with a peculiar look in his eyes. "You can smoke and gamble to your hearts' content. Rattlesnake, here, will play with you, and there'll be some one else in before long. Pote Billings is in this neighborhood somewhere, and he's a fiend at poker."

"I thought Pete was going with you?" spoke up Mrs. James, quickly.

Jesse James gave her a warning look before he answered.

"He was, but he changed his mind," he said, grimly. "He had the bad taste to get shot this noon, and with a bullet hole in his arm a man can't do much but play poker."

"Thet ther sleuth-hound done it! I seen ther hull thing!" broke in Rattlesnake Bill, who had been pulling vigorously at a black bottle.

"Yes, and Jess settled the sleuth," remarked Frank James, as he filled his pipe. "He left him propped up against a hemlock as a warning to others of his calling!"

He glanced sharply at the two young men as he spoke, but the glance told him nothing, for Davis was shuffling a greasy pack of cards as if his life depended on it, and Duncan was gazing with unconcealed admiration into the eyes of Miss Jean Collins, as their hostess called her.

The young girl had recovered from her timidity in a measure, and was chatting more freely, and for a few minutes Duncan almost forgot his grave surroundings.

The evening wore on, and Jesse James busied himself cleaning and loading two excellent rifles, which he laid on shelves near two of the windows and then gave his attention to a brace of expensive pistols, at the same time keeping up his share of the general conversation.

About nine o'clock the fellow called Pete Billings dropped in, bringing a brutal specimen of a bloodhound with him.

As the pair entered the room, the detectives hardly knew which was most formidable, man or dog, for they were both red in the eyeballs, showing their bloodthirsty natures.

Miss Collins gave a little cry as she saw the dog, but the wife of Jesse James only smiled good-naturedly.

"You would never do for an outlaw's wife, Jean," she said, with a quick glance at Mustang Mike, one of her husband's boon companions. "You'll have to screw up your courage a little before you and Mike get married."

Miss Collins bit her lips, and her rosy cheeks paled instantly, while, to save himself, Duncan could not help turning and staring at the fellow.

Mustang Mike was a half-breed, about thirty years old, and, while he was a fine type of physical manhood, his face was cruel and repulsive, bespeaking a vindictive nature.

He was looking at the young girl with an evil expression in his eyes now, and involuntarily the detective's hand dropped to the butt of his revolver.

Jesse James was busily talking with the newcomer, but he noticed the movement and a moment later he mentioned it casually.

"Better look to your rights, Mike, when other gallants are around! I wouldn't like to lose you just now, when I'm on the edge of a venture!"

A sarcastic chuckle accompanied the remark, and the half-breed glanced angrily around until he detected Duncan's expression.

"What air yer talkin' erbout, Jess? It's er cold day when Mustang Mike hez ter be told ter purtect his own! Ther gal's mine when I want her! Let them as thinks diffrent take warnin'!" he growled, savagely.

He glared at Duncan as he spoke, and then his hand also rested lightly upon an ugly-looking weapon.

Duncan was about to break out impetuously when a warning cough from Davis brought him to his senses. He turned and caught the glance of a pair of hazel eyes turned full upon him with such a terrified expression in their depths that his lips were silenced in a moment.

"Sorry to leave you, gentlemen, but business is business!" said Jesse James, rising at that minute. "Bolt the doors, my dear, and see that your pops are in order. Can't ever tell what may happen, you know," he added, with a shrewd glance at the detectives, "but I reckon I can trust you to look after the women in my absence!"

"You can, indeed, to the death!" said Duncan, with his eyes on Miss Collins.

Mustang Mike rose with a curse, and as he passed Duncan's chair he tripped over his feet purposely.

At any other time the detective would have sprung at the fellow and given him all the trouble that he was looking for, but, as he half rose from his chair, a gentle hand on his arm detained him.

"Don't! Please don't! It will only make matters worse!" whispered Miss Collins in his ear.

He clenched his hands angrily, but sat down again, and a mocking laugh from the others followed the action.

"Now, gentlemen, shall we draw around the table and have a game of cards?" asked Davis, coming to the rescue. "I'm sure the ladies have had enough of our talk, and a game of poker is always restful."

"We don't find it so out hyar, stranger," laughed Rattlesnake Bill. "It all depends on whether ther game is squar', and er squar' game ain't ter be depended on in ther shadder of ther Rockies."

"Then, I'll be on the safe side," said Davis, drawing his pistol and laying it on the table. "I'm a tenderfoot myself and don't know much about cheating."

He had seen several glances exchanged between Rattlesnake Bill and Pete already, as they were drawing up to the table, but there was no opportunity for him to have a word with Duncan.

That some one else was about the place had now become apparent to the detectives, for they suddenly heard the clatter of hoofs just outside of the rear door, and a moment later there was a low, penetrating whistle.

Jesse James kissed his wife and then stalked out with his brother, Mustang Mike and his third man behind him. Just as they reached the door the outlaw turned back and called the bloodhound.

As the great creature slouched out, Miss Collins gave a sigh of relief, but Mrs. James took a lamp from the chimney-piece and went out after her husband.

When she returned she seated herself near Miss Collins at one end of the room, and, for some time after the game started, both sat in profound silence.

The detectives would have given a good deal to have known the outlaw's errand, for, to judge by the sad looks of Mrs. James, he was off on some perilous undertaking.

To shoot the man down in his own house was next to impossible, for almost at a change of voice his hand would drop to his pistol, but to feel that he was almost in their power, and yet at liberty to carry on some fiendish deed, was maddening.

It had become apparent to both that they must keep their wits about them and watch the game, but Duncan had one ear open for every whisper that fell from the lips of Miss Collins, when the ladies finally began talking softly.

At last a few words reached him that sent the blood surging to his brain, and in a second he noticed that Davis had also heard it.

"Jess thinks he can get that gold dust to-night," Mrs. James said, softly. "Duck Raynor passed here to-day and stopped a minute, and he says Jess has only to tell where it is and every man in the Gulch will help him!"

"But where is the sheriff?" asked Miss Collins, in a whisper.

"There aren't five men in the Gulch who will back sheriff! They are only a lot of turncoats! They'd the sheriff chase Jess if there was no bigger game them, but, if Jess should tell them of the gold, th turn and do exactly as he told them!" was the answer.

"Who does the gold belong to?" was the next question.

"A miner by the name of Watts. He has a dug and a cabin in the Gulch! No one knows how he managed to keep it so still. Jess himself never heard the dust until yesterday. They say Watts has w East for men to come and help him work the claim, in reality he wants to get the dust out of the Gul without any one knowing it."

"Where would he take it to?"

"Cheyenne, I presume! He could hire a mule team take it to the railroad. The men would be suspicious he undertook to use the ore cars."

"A dangerous trip, any way he attempts it," sighed Miss Collins.

Mrs. James laughed, grimly.

"No, it isn't, for he will never take it. Jess will sa him the trouble."

"Then you think he will succeed?"

"My husband never fails!" was the low but proud answer.

The cards were dealt again and the game went on, but both Duncan and Davis had suddenly lost interest and were wondering how they could call a halt without precipitating trouble.

Nearly three hours had passed and the pile of gold at Rattlesnake's right hand was slowly growing larger, still the detectives could see nothing that was in any way irregular.

Mrs. James watched a small clock upon the mantel as a cat would watch a mouse, and two or three times she rose and went to the window and looked out.

Two large bottles of whisky had been drained by the outlaws, and as midnight passed the men became a little more daring.

Suddenly Davis saw a card pass from one to the other. It was done under the pretense of passing the bottle.

As quick as a flash, he picked up his revolver and, giving Duncan a look, placed his finger on the trigger.

The crack of a weapon directly behind his back followed and a bullet grazed his ear and went crashing through the window opposite.

Duncan wheeled around and saw a man's hand holding a revolver, protruding from behind the inner door, and a second later the revolver was sent spinning by a bullet, while a howl of pain showed that he had winged the fellow.

Davis leaned over the table, covering both men at a

time, and his eyes flashed fire as he shouted, like a trumpet:

"Pass me that gold, and be quick about it; then throw up your hands or I'll blow you to blazes!"

Crack!

Duncan's weapon spoke again, and there was another howl, but not until a sharp report was followed by a stinging pain in Davis' left arm.

The detective knew he had been hit, but his eyes never wavered, and his finger pressed the trigger until the pile of gold changed places.

A volley of shots followed, for the half-drunken men lost their heads completely, but they were the victims of cool nerves and both went down like logs, while the detectives were unharmed, except from the ball of the hidden outlaw.

This had plowed a furrow through the detective's arm, but he was satisfied in an instant that the bone was not injured.

"I guess we'd better get out of here while we can," said Duncan, in his friend's ear, as the noise of the shots subsided. "Are you hurt bad, old man? If not, we'd better hustle!"

"There must be more horses! Come!" was the answer.

Mrs. James had staggered to her feet, but she did not attempt to stop them, and as they hurried toward the rear door, Duncan looked for Miss Collins.

"Oh, please take me with you! There are plenty of horses and I can ride as well as any one," said a voice in his ear, and he turned to find Miss Collins wrapping a scarf around her shoulders.

"You shall go with us, by all means, and I will protect you with my life!" began Duncan, when suddenly some one gave a tremendous kick on the panels.

Mrs. James opened the door instantly, and her husband strode in alone.

"Quick! Bolt the doors and bar the windows! The sheriff is after me! Hang it! What's the matter with you all? Why don't you obey orders?" he roared.

He caught sight of the dead bodies just then, and in an instant his face was purple.

"They cheated, Jess!" said Mrs. James, quickly. "You bolt the door! I'll bar the windows!"

The outlaw turned to obey, and in a second Jean Collins whispered in Duncan's ear:

"Quick! If you are an enemy to Jess, don't show it now! If you are a detective, you must give me your badge and papers! It will be sure death for you to keep them!"

Duncan did not hesitate, but slipped his hand inside his jacket and drew out a small package, which the young girl promptly transferred to her pocket.

At that minute Davis dropped to the floor in a dead faint. He had neglected his wound too long, and the loss of too much blood had produced unconsciousness.

CHAPTER III.

IN A FALSE POSITION.

What the outlaw would have done under different circumstances cannot be recorded, for he was at that minute being pursued by a mob of men who had caught him in a bad night's work and were fuming with rage because he had escaped from them. After seeing that the doors were securely bolted and taking a glance at the three dead men, he rushed to the side of Duncan, and, grabbing him by the shoulder, fairly jerked him off his feet.

"See here!" he said, sternly. "The sheriff is after me, curse him! Man that window yonder and see that you do good work shooting down the rascals! I'll spare your life if you help me protect my own, but a sign of treachery from you will send you straight to perdition!"

He snatched the pistol from the detective's belt as he spoke and filled every chamber; then, forcing it into his hand, he pushed him toward the window.

There were only three windows in the room and Mrs. James was already at one of them with one pistol in her hand and another tucked carefully through the belt of her white apron.

Duncan gave a quick look at his friend, and saw that Miss Collins was bending over him, and, feeling sure that she would relieve him of all tell-tale documents also, he was satisfied to go on and obey his host's orders.

It did not occur to him to doubt the young lady's loyalty, for there was a look in her eyes that had won his confidence, and he had decided that she was a prisoner, who was at the mercy of the outlaws, and who would seize upon any opportunity to secure more congenial surroundings.

Jesse James attempted to pull Davis to his feet, but one look at the limp arm, with the blood dripping from the finger tips showed him that the man was injured, and could be of no assistance until his wound was attended to.

"Can you bind up his arm, Jean?" he asked. "I hate to ask you, for I know how the sight of blood affects you, but the sheriff is here and I need the fellow!"

"What happened, Jess?" asked his wife, eagerly. "Did you get the gold, or were they waiting for you?"

"They were laying for us, curse them! They headed us off at the cross roads before we could get into the Gulch! Johnson has scared up more assistants than I thought was possible to guard the treasure, but wait till the other fellows get wind that the stuff is there! They'll clean out the Gulch! Watts has more than me to fear,

and he knows it! I've got hot work ahead if I get that boodle now, but you shall hear all the details later! We must not waste a minute! This fellow, whoever he is, is bleeding too much! Jean will have to try and put on a compress!"

"I'll do the best I can," was the young girl's answer, and as the outlaw strode to the unguarded window, she drew off the detective's jacket and began rolling up his shirt sleeves. The clatter of horses' hoofs could be heard distinctly now, and a moment later the sheriff's posse came to a halt a little distance from the farmhouse.

It was a very dark night, so those inside could see nothing, but the yelling of the men showed that they were at the rear of the building, where they evidently had gone to get away from the front and side windows.

Duncan was boiling with indignation at his unpleasant position, for to be acting as protector of the body of Jesse James was not to his liking. But if he did not at least appear to protect him his life would pay the forfeit.

"Hello, inside thar!" bawled a loud voice at that minute. "We've got you, Jesse James, so you may's well surrender! We'll burn down the shanty ef you don't give in peace'bly!"

There was no reply, for the outlaw was blowing out the lamps in the room so that everything should be in darkness, and giving his orders to his wife and Duncan.

"Ef you'll come out and surrender you won't be hurt, Jess! Yer head's worth more ter us on er live body than on er dead one," went on the sheriff, "but you want'er speak quick, for we ain't in no mood for foolin'! We're hyar ter put an end to yer deviltry, and we're goin' ter do it!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Jesse James, through the broken pane of glass in his window. "Talk's cheap, Sheriff Johnson! If you want me, come and get me, that's my advice to you!"

"Then you won't come out?"

"Never! What in thunder do you take me for! Go ahead and do your worst, and take that for a starter!"

As he spoke he raised a rifle from a shelf near the window, and sent a ball from one of its barrels speeding through the darkness. A yell from one of the posse followed, then a volley of bullets came crashing through the window.

"Lie low, Jean! Don't raise your head above the sash!" warned the outlaw, as he drew back out of range, and then there was silence both inside and out for a minute.

"He's all right now, Jess! It was only a flesh wound and I've bandaged it pretty well, I think! Shall I give

him a drink out of one of those bottles?" whispered Miss Collins, softly.

Jesse James drew a flask from his pocket, and, stooping down, sent it spinning across the floor in her direction, and, after a swallow or two, Davis opened his eyes and looked around him.

Another yell from the sheriff distracted the outlaw's attention, and, just then, Jean managed to get possession of the second batch of papers.

She secreted them cleverly in her dress, after a brief whisper in the detective's ear; then, as he staggered to his feet, she handed him a loaded weapon.

A tremendous kicking upon the panels of the side door began at that minute, and, obeying an order from the outlaw, Duncan left his window and went over to it.

Putting his ear to a knothole in the wood he listened a second, then the kicking stopped and he detected a low whistle.

The crack of Jesse James' weapon sounded at the same time, so the outlaw did not notice it. Putting his lips close to the hole, Duncan softly answered the whistle.

Instantly the vile odor of mingled whisky and tobacco came through the hole and, exchanging his ear for his eye, Duncan caught a whisper: "Let me in, Jess! It's me, Mustang Mike! I've fooled them cursed scoundrels! Let me in quick afore they see me!"

Duncan did some rapid thinking, and summed up his conclusion. Mustang Mike was a desperado of the very worst type, and it was plain to be seen that he had some hold on Miss Collins.

No one in the room had heard either the whistle or the whisper except himself and, of course, there was no one to prove that he had heard them. Once more the kicking on the panels began and a roar from Jesse James assisted his decision.

"Curse them! They'll kick the door in! The bloodhounds are eager to get at me, but let them come at their peril!"

Duncan set his teeth hard, but he did not hesitate.

He knew that some part of Mustang Mike's anatomy was in front of that knothole, and, putting the muzzle of his pistol close to the opening, he pulled the trigger.

A howl of pain followed and then Jesse James, thinking it was one of the sheriff's men, burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha! ha! Well done. Pick 'em off one by one! That's pretty good for a tenderfoot, to shoot through a knothole!"

Duncan did not answer, but crept back to his window, for the crowds outside showed that the sheriff's men were dividing their forces and taking up their stands at various points around the building.

Their weapons soon began cracking merrily, and leaden

hail was poured into the three windows at once, until not an inch of glass was left in the sashes.

Jesse James emptied his revolver, and yells of pain followed each shot, for it seemed as if the fellow could actually shoot around a corner.

Mrs. James kept up a lively popping, and was as cool as her husband, while Duncan fired occasionally, but took pains to hit nothing.

Davis crept close to the side door and crouched, ready to shoot, if it was necessary to defend himself from the sheriff's posse, in case they managed to get in, for, of course, at first sight, they would take him for an outlaw.

Miss Collins knelt at his side, with the whisky flask in her hand, and twice she put it to his lips, just as he became faint and dizzy.

How long the siege would last was more than any one could tell, but at last there came a yell of victory, which told Duncan only too plainly that they had found the wounded outlaw.

He tried to peer through the darkness for a glimpse of his host's face, but the smoke from their pistols made this impossible.

Another yell and a rush of feet at the side door strengthened his convictions. Then he felt rather than saw the bandit king's eagle eye upon him.

"Who was that at the door?" he asked, suspiciously.

Duncan tried to frame an indifferent answer, something to the effect that "it was probably one of the sheriff's posse."

"You lie! It was Frank!" fairly panted the outlaw. "I parted with him a mile this side of the bend! He got here safe and you shot him, you traitor!"

"It's not true!" said Duncan, stoutly. "If it had been your brother, he would have said so, wouldn't he?"

The outlaw moved cautiously across the room, keeping well out of range of the windows, and, as he reached Duncan, he bent and hissed, threateningly:

"I'll find out who it was, and, if it was Frank, your life will pay the penalty! I'll kill you by inches and by the worst of tortures! I'll roast you alive! I'll set the bloodhound on you! I'll——"

"Wait till you find out before you make your threats, Jesse James!" interrupted Duncan, coolly. "This is no time to jump at conclusions, when we are fighting for you! Remember, please, that we are only your guests! This is none of our funeral, and we don't have to fight if we don't want to!"

"Bah! You've got to fight to protect yourselves! Those curs outside will think you are outlaws, and it's small mercy you'd get if they were to get in here!"

Duncan did not answer, but he realized the truth of the outlaw's words, and just then Jesse James placed one end of a sort of funnel that he had made out of a

piece of paper at the knothole in the door, and bawled out, lustily:

"Hello, Frank! Is that you! Mike! Bones! Hello, out there!"

An answer came back in the sheriff's voice, and Duncan felt his knees shake a little as he waited for the effect of his words on the outlaw.

"Haw! haw! Thet thar's er rich joke, Jess!" roared the fellow, merrily. "Yer shot Mustang Mike, thinkin' he was one of my men! He ain't dead yet, ther whelp, but we'll very soon finish him, I reckon! Now, then, come out of yer hole, if yer think yer kin save him!"

The outlaw let out a curse and turned upon Duncan with a growl of rage, but, before he could reach him, Miss Collins had forced herself between them.

"Hoid on, Jess! Not so fast! How was he to know it was Mike? You thought yourself that it was one of the posse!" she cried, sharply.

The outlaw's steely eyes shot fire in the darkness like a tiger's but he drew back slowly and just then his wife gave a sharp cry and staggered from the window.

Without even ducking his head, Jesse James strode across the room, and a moment later he was bending over her and holding her in his arms.

"It's only a scratch! Don't be frightened, dear," said the outlaw, in such a changed voice that it did not seem possible it could come from the same person.

"I'm all right now, Jess! There, that will do nicely! I don't know what made me cry out. I must be nervous," said Mrs. James, contritely.

He bent to kiss her gently, and then the kicking began on the panels again, this time at the rear door, which was much lighter than the other.

The wood began cracking instantly, and then one of the hinges burst, and, with a chorus of yells, the pounding was redoubled.

"We're comin', Jess! Thar ain't nothin' kin stop us!" bawled the sheriff, just as the last hinge parted.

The posse burst into the room, yelling like a band of Apache Indians, but for just a minute the darkness hampered them.

"At 'em, men! Fire in every direction! The dogs are skulkin' in ther corners, most likely!" roared the sheriff.

Davis jammed himself into a niche between the logs only a few feet from the rear door, while Miss Collins disappeared somewhere in the neighborhood of Duncan.

Before a shot had been fired both detectives heard the sharp click of a bolt, and the next second the forms of Jesse James and his wife seemed to disappear as if by magic.

"Whoop! Look thar, men! It's er trapdoor!" shouted the sheriff. "Hang ther scoundrel! He's got er

private exit ter ther regions below! Bring er lantern, somebody! I'm er goin' arter him!"

This distracted the attention of the whole posse, and during the excitement that followed the two detectives were active.

Davis made a dash for the door, stooping and darting between the legs of a brawny miner, and then ran plump into the arms of another of the sheriff's assistants.

There was no time for explanations, as the fellow's weapon was all cocked, so he swung his right and hit him a clip under the ear that sent him sprawling and gave the detective time to bolt into a convenient thicket.

Meanwhile, Duncan had raised Miss Collins bodily and dropped her through the window, but as he attempted to follow her he was yanked back vigorously, and a yell from the posse told him that they took him to be one of the rascals they were after. He kept his wits about him, however, in spite of the fact that several cold muzzles rested close to his head, and his first words delayed the pulling of a trigger.

"Hold on! I'm a Pinkerton detective! I've killed three of the outlaw gang already! Look around the room, if you don't believe it!"

"Give the scamp ther benefit of ther doubt," was the sheriff's answer, as he pinioned the detective's arms.

Duncan talked fast, and in a minute the posse stumbled over the three bodies and, by holding lighted matches over their faces, they were able to recognize them.

Duncan explained how he happened to be in the company of Jesse James, and the sheriff let go of his arms with a characteristic warning.

"Yer may be tellin' ther truth and yer may be lyin'! I'll give yer a chance ter prove yer words, but if yer be traitors ther good Lord help yer!"

Duncan's next words fairly electrified the official, for he retorted, in a low voice:

"I can prove that I was sent out here to help John Watts remove his gold dust to Cheyenne City, and I expect you, Sheriff Johnson, to help me do my duty."

"Jumpin' sandhills! Is thet thar so! Waal, yer've come in ther nick of time, if thet thar's true! Thet's egzakly ther reason why I'm er tryin' ter ketch Jess ter-night! He wuz arter ther stuff, an' it's set ther rest of ther Gulch ter guessin'! Like as not, thar'll be a riot afore I kin git back ter stop it!"

He explained the situation to the men in a few words, but it was evident that they all treated the story with some suspicion.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE MERCY OF JESSE JAMES.

Davis kept quiet in the bushes and listened to the racket inside of the house, but his anxiety for his friend finally

got the best of him and he began edging his way around to the side door of the building.

There had been no pistol shots since he vacated the kitchen, so he had reason to think that nothing serious had happened, and he almost regretted his hasty exit.

All of a sudden he stumbled over a crouching form, and, with a little cry of fear, Miss Collins sprang to her feet and started to run from him.

"Don't be frightened! It's only me!" whispered the detective. "How in the world did you get out, and where is Duncan?"

The girl stopped instantly and came close to his side in order to be sure who it was that had spoken.

"He put me out of the window and I thought he was right behind me, but they must have pulled him back," she said, quickly. "Come, let us go in at once and try to explain matters."

She started toward the door and then turned back to whisper cautiously. "If I had not been so frightened, Mr. Davis, I could have told them what to do. That underground passage ends in an old well just back of the farmhouse, and there's no doubt but that Jess is out and off by this time."

"Is it possible? Hurry and tell them, Miss Collins. They won't hurt you, and we must catch that fellow."

Miss Collins darted ahead and Davis attempted to follow, but a sudden severe twinge of pain in his arm made him weak and dizzy.

A rustle in the bushes at his side startled him, and at that second a dark figure bounded after Miss Collins, and as the ruffian overtook her he clapped one hand over her mouth to prevent her crying out and then, raising her in his arms, dashed on through the darkness around the angle of the building.

Davis gave a yell of warning and did his best to follow, but in less than a minute he had lost sight of the fellow.

As the sheriff and half of his men came pouring out of the side door the detective strode to meet them, talking as fast as possible.

"They've got her! Quick! After them, sheriff!" he yelled. "Jesse James will be out of the passage and away in a jiffy! If your men know the location of the old well send them to guard it at once! Don't lose a minute!"

"Do as he says, sheriff. That's my partner, Mr. Davis," cried Duncan from inside of the kitchen. "Thank fortune he's alive! I was afraid some of you fellows had killed him."

"It would be your own fault ef we hed," was the sheriff's answer. "How wuz we ter know ther were honest men in this hyar shanty? Hi, thar, Ted! You an' Jim git out an' see if you kind find thet well. Hawley kin stay right hyar an' keep an eye on thet thar rathole.

Now, who ther devil is ther gal yer talkin' erbout, ennyhow?"

"Her name is Collins—Jean Collins," said Duncan, coming out on the steps. "We found her here when we got here, sheriff, and if she's not a prisoner I'll eat my shirt. If the scoundrels have got her again we must hurry to the rescue."

"One at er time, young man. We'll tend ter Jesse James fust. 'Tain't likely ther robbers will hurt ther gal."

"But that brute, Mustang Mike, is going to marry her against her will," continued Duncan, as the posse divided and began scouring the premises, leaving Davis and himself in company with the sheriff.

"No, he ain't! He's done fer!" chuckled the sheriff, as he swung his lantern over the bushes. "He's out yender in ther stable with er bullet in his hip, and Big-Neck Perkins is er keepin' him company."

"Then he isn't dead," began Duncan, when a shout from the rear of the farmhouse interrupted him.

"Whoop! Hi, thar, sheriff! We've found ther well! Ther scamp hez made tracks fer ther foothills yender. Thar's ther print of two critters' hoofs as clear as day."

"Now, how ther deuce did he git them beasts around hyar?" exclaimed the sheriff when they reached the well and the light from his lantern showed him the fresh tracks of two horses.

"It was probably the fellow that stole the girl. I don't remember of seeing him in the house, so he must have been lurking outside," said Davis, anxiously.

"One of Jesse's scouts. He's got no end of 'em," said one of the men. Then, after a careful look at the hoof prints, he added: "Thet thar print wuz made by his hoss Fleetwind, ef I ain't mistaken."

"Then thar ain't no use our follerin', fer we'd never ketch thet beast," was the sheriff's prompt answer.

"Thunder! We've got to catch him! The girl must be saved!" broke in Duncan, angrily. "Are there any horses in the stable? If there are, let's be off. We're only wasting time and letting the fellow get away from us."

The sheriff shook his head and then gave an order to his men to board up the well and roll some stones on it.

"Whoever's down thar will stay, I reckon," he said, grimly. "Now, see hyar, young man, I know thet thar robber better'n you do, I reckon. I've been arter him afore, an' I know his ways. What's more, how do I know you fellers air honest? I ain't got nothin' so fer but yer word ter vouch fer it."

Duncan and Davis glanced at each other and both felt decidedly uneasy, for Miss Collins had told them both that she would keep their papers safely, and now she was out of their reach and in the hands of their enemies.

Duncan's quick wits stood by him in this as in all other emergencies, and as he followed the sheriff back to the house he explained matters glibly.

"Anything you wish to know I will tell you, sheriff," he began, "but you've got sense enough to know that we ain't displaying any badges. What do you suppose Jess would have done to us to-night if he had known we were detectives?"

"Riddled yer, or wuss," was the official's prompt answer.

"Of course he would, and, you bet, we knew it, so we ordered our documents sent by mail, and we'll get 'em at the Gulch when the mail coach gets in. You'll have to trust us until then, sheriff, but, of course, you're more than welcome to keep your game eye on us."

"I reckon, now, I'd do thet thar anyhow, whether I wuz welcome or not," answered the sheriff, dryly, and then, as the rest of the posse came trooping in, they lined up around the table to talk over the situation.

"There isn't any doubt but what Jess has gone, is there?" asked Davis, with an uneasy look toward the two doors.

"Ef thar's any suspicions ter ther contrary, Ted hyar kin stay outside an' scout around," said the sheriff, glancing at one of his men, who promptly drew a revolver from his belt and left the kitchen.

"Now, then, afore we begin this hyar caucus s'pose you go out yender ter ther stable an' see how Big-Neck's er gettin' on. We'll wait fer yer ter report," went on the sheriff, with a glance at another of his company.

The man was about to depart when a yell of terror outside was followed by the reappearance of the first man with a ferocious bloodhound at his heels, the fangs of the great brute being already buried in his clothing.

Several pistols spoke promptly, and the big beast let go its hold and rolled over on the floor. Then the man whom he had been chasing closed the door behind him. He was too late, for a bullet came crashing through the door and struck him squarely in the face, knocking him down as flat as though a hammer had struck him.

"At 'em, men! Fire!" yelled the sheriff, springing toward the door.

Another bullet sung across the room, grazing his arm on its way, and then the posse fired a volley straight out into the darkness. As the report died out there came an echoing shout from the stable, and crack! crack! crack! went several weapons in that direction.

"Split, boys! Half on yer go one way an' half the t'other!" cried the sheriff, and rapid exits through both doors were made by the posse. The two detectives were among those who went out through the side door, and they were obliged to make a detour of the building in or-

der to reach the low sheds in the rear that did duty as stables.

Half way around the building they heard the low whinnying of a horse, and as quick as a flash Duncan put his hand on his chum's shoulder.

"See here, old man, this won't do," he said, softly. "Jesse James has escaped, and no doubt Miss Collins is with him. What the deuce do we care about the rest of the outlaw gang? I move that we steal horses, if we can find them, and get after the robber. The sheriff can take care of whoever may be skulking in this vicinity."

"I'm with you, and here's the first horse," was the quiet answer. "Shall I mount and wait for you at that high tree yonder?"

He pointed toward a giant poplar, whose topmost branches were faintly outlined against the sky at a little distance from the farmhouse, and a second later he was dashing away in that direction.

Duncan started on again after the sheriff, but as he turned the corner of the building he paused in amazement. The roofs of the row of sheds were blazing, and around them was drawn up a formidable array of horsemen, who were armed to the teeth with knives and revolvers.

The two sections of the sheriff's men were directly in their range, and were so taken by surprise that not one had pulled a trigger.

Duncan had just sense enough to dart back around the corner of the building before he was seen, and from here he listened breathlessly for what was to follow.

"Good-evening, sheriff," called a voice that he recognized at once as belonging to Frank James. "Sorry to surprise you, but we were obliged to move easy. So you've run Jess out of his own house, have you? Well, you wouldn't have done it if I could have got my men together sooner."

"Curse you! Yer've got hyar too quick as it stands, Frank James!" answered the sheriff, savagely. "Now, what ther deuce is yer game, anyway? Don't yer know thet Mustang Mike is burnin' ter death in them stables?"

"Yes, we know it, but there's two of your men in there, sheriff," laughed Frank, "so you see the odds are in our favor."

"An' Mike's done up, anyhow," called another coarse voice, "so he won't be much of a loss, no matter how yer look at it."

The sheriff groaned, but he could see no way of saving his men, for a movement forward or backward would only precipitate trouble.

At this stage of the game Duncan decided to act.

He had two pistols in his belt and both of them were six shooters, with every chamber loaded.

By firing both together he figured that he might create

a little consternation and perhaps give the sheriff and his men a chance to do something. Moving as carefully as he could he got behind a small tree, whose trunk would barely protect his body. Then, just as a yell from the stable told that the doomed men had given up hope, he raised the two pistols on either side of the tree and rapidly pressed the triggers.

The twelve shots that followed went straight to the mark, and howls of pain and snorts of fear followed.

Three of the outlaws pitched forward from their horses without firing their weapons and those who did fire were reckless in their shots because of the sudden rearing of their horses.

Just as Duncan had expected, the sheriff's men lost no time in improving their opportunity, and in a minute the place had become a pandemonium.

Darting from behind the tree, Duncan sprang into an empty saddle, and, putting spurs to the horse, he made a dash around the building.

With a volley of oaths, one of the outlaws was after him, and for the next five minutes the detective could not even look behind him for fear of the horse pitching into some ditch or rushing headlong into some impenetrable thicket.

Two bullets whistled by his ears, but he kept straight on, urging his horse over clumps of bushes at a rate of speed that threatened to end disastrously every minute.

As he raced on through the darkness he glanced up and saw the poplar only a little ahead, and a moment later he was able to outline the form of a horseman standing quietly under the tree.

Supposing it to be Davis, he gave a cry of warning that the outlaw was behind and then redoubled the speed of his own horse in the hope of distancing his pursuer.

Instead of obeying his warning, he was astonished to see the lone horseman merely raise his head, and the next minute the voice of Jesse James came to his ears like the blast of a trumpet.

"Halt! Throw up your hands! Attempt to pass me and I'll blow a hole through you!"

Duncan set his teeth and gripped his revolver a little tighter, but instead of slowing his speed he only dug his spurs in harder.

Jesse James seemed astonished at his daring and made a movement to block his way, but a second later he reconsidered his move and turned his horse a little, at the same time sending a bullet speeding in the direction of the detective.

Duncan felt a sharp sting of pain in his leg just above his boot top, but bravely raising his weapon he snapped the trigger.

There was no report, for every chamber was empty.

The next second a flash from the outlaw's weapon was

followed by a snort of pain, and the horse he was riding plunged forward and threw him headlong.

Once more he was at the mercy of the outlaw.

CHAPTER V.

THE INDIAN WOMAN.

"Ha! ha! That's what you get for not obeying orders!" roared Jesse James, as he dismounted from his horse and bent over the detective.

The outlaw who had been pursuing came up just then and the two continued to chuckle over the fallen man for some minutes.

Duncan had landed on his head in some bushes and was only a little dazed, but when he attempted to rise to his feet he felt a firm hand on his collar.

"Bind the fellow's wrists, Clell, and set him on your horse," ordered Jesse James. "We must make tracks from here or that cursed posse will be after us."

"No 'twon't! Frank's there and he's got a dozen of the gang with him," was the prompt answer, as the fellow called Clell drew a stout piece of twine from his pocket.

"Great Scott! How did he manage it? Why, he had only three men with him when I left him," was the answer.

Clell bound the detective's wrists tightly before he answered and then proceeded to put a gag in his mouth.

"Let him talk, 'twon't do any harm, as there's no one but us to hear him," said Jesse James, taking a sharp look at the detective.

Clell put his handkerchief back in his pocket obediently and then, taking Duncan by the shoulders, he jerked him toward one of the horses.

"Bill Burns and 'Curley the Fox' was coming from ther Big Horn trail an' they hed four or five of yer friends with 'em, Jess, so they made quite er respectable party," he said, grimly. "When they got ter ther farmhouse ther sheriff wuz inside an' knowin' thet two of his men wuz in ther stable Fred Butts set fire ter ther roof an' er minit later we heard Mustang Mike er yellin'."

"Was he in the stable?"

"Yes, with er bullet in his hip. He wuz a gone goose, Jess, so it didn't matter."

Jesse James had remounted his horse now, and Clell was forcing himself into the saddle behind the detective, and a moment later they were moving forward at an easy canter.

The ground had smoothed out considerably and there were very few treacherous spots. As they jogged along the sky became lighter.

"Yes, Frank got 'em all inter line," went on Clell, as soon as he was comfortably settled in the saddle, "and when ther sheriff come out he wuz ready ter riddle 'em,

when this hyar feller let loose with his pop and made ther hull bunch think that er regiment wuz comin'."

"You don't mean that they balked, do you?" asked the outlaw, quickly.

"Ther warn't time ter balk, Jess! Ther galoot is er dead shot. He knocked Pepper Box and Dod Hines clean out of ther saddles, and jest as I spied him 'Jimmy ther Snipe' went over."

"He'll pay for all that, curse him!" roared the outlaw, looking back over his shoulder. "I was suspicious of those two dudes all the evening, Clell, and its dollars to doughnuts we've caught a detective."

"I reckon thet thar's right. He don't b'long hyar-about," was the answer.

Duncan had listened patiently, but he was beginning to think it was time for him to take part in the conversation, and he straightened up so suddenly that he nearly pushed Clell off the saddle.

"Hold on, you two. You've done about guessing enough," he said, coolly. "I've been so rattled all night that I couldn't talk, but perhaps you'll be willing to hear my story, gentlemen."

"Out with it, you whelp, and see that you stick to the truth!" said Jesse James, promptly. "I've got what you told me at supper all written down on paper. You're Mr. Herbert McAllister, of St. Louis, I believe you said, and you're going to Coyote Gulch to do some prospecting."

"That's right, as far as it goes," said Duncan, promptly, "but there is a little something else to be added to that yarn. I'm civil engineer and I was sent out here by the St. Louis syndicate that's trying to buy the claim that John Benjamin Watts is working."

"Thunder! D'ye hear thet thar, Jess?" exclaimed Clell when he finished.

"Who forms the syndicate? Give me their names," said Jesse James, as he suddenly turned his horse into a narrow path that zig-zagged through a lot of scraggly bushes.

Duncan was making his story up out of "whole cloth," but he did not delay a minute in answering.

"That's a secret at present," he said, glibly, "but I don't mind saying that my father, John McAllister, is one of the number, so you see, my errand out here is of a private nature. I did not want the natives of the Gulch to know me, for fear of trouble."

"I reckon ye're right thar. The Coyote miners ain't stuck on syndicates, an' I 'low they'd send yer higher'n er kite ef they wuz ter get onter it, but I reckon now yer ain't got nothin' ter worry erbout in thet thar direction. Jess, hyar, kin map out er path thet will relieve yer of yer anxieties."

He looked at the outlaw as he spoke and the two of

them roared with laughter, which led the detective to infer that they did not credit his story.

"I guess I'd fare as well in their hands as in yours," he said, nervily. "You are all a lot of cutthroats and robbers."

There was no reply to this speech, but Jesse James urged his horse a little faster, and a few minutes later they struck the main road again and Duncan saw at a glance that they had been going around in a circle.

"Hello! What the deuce does this mean?" he demanded, coolly. "Are you two fellows training for a circus?"

"Shut your mouth or you'll find out more'n you want to, I'm thinking," said Jesse James, gruffly. Then he put his fingers to his lips and gave a shrill whistle.

"Great snakes! 'Tain't possible they're all on 'em done fer, is it, Jess?" asked Clell, after they had waited a minute and received no answer.

"It looks very much like it. Come! We'll go back to the house and see what has happened. Wait! Tie that fellow to a tree and leave him till we come back. You can gag him now, Clell, and see you make a good job of it."

Clell dropped from the saddle, dragging Duncan with him, and five minutes later the detective was bound to a small tree some distance from the roadway and a gag put in his mouth to prevent his helloing.

"Go through his pockets, Clell," ordered the bandit chief again, and just at that minute the detective blessed Miss Collins.

So far Jesse James had no proof as to who he was, but it remained to be seen how long it would be before he got the papers, for a careless word from Miss Collins would reveal the secret.

As the outlaws rode away, after a fruitless search through his clothing, Duncan cursed his luck bitterly, but this was not the worst of his troubles, for he was more than anxious about the fate of his chum and Miss Collins.

He had not seen a sign of Davis, and the fact that Jesse James had awaited him at the spot where he expected to meet his friend was very significant.

He was straining at his bonds and trying by every possible movement of his head to loosen his gag, when the sound of a low whistle from the bushes greeted him.

Whether to answer it or not was the question that at once entered his head, but, thinking that his position could not be worse, he endeavored to find some method of replying.

There was nothing to do but to bend his body forward and try to shake the tree, hoping that the unusual rustling in the foliage would attract attention.

Over and over again he wriggled and twisted, and at

last he was rewarded by hearing a slight rustle in the bushes.

The next minute the queerest creature that he had ever set eyes on emerged from a clump of alders and crept slowly toward him; then it suddenly rose to its full height and he discovered that it was a woman.

She was a little better to look at when she stood in her normal position, but Duncan felt cold shivers run up his spine as he caught a good glimpse of her features.

There was nothing that he could do but stand and stare at her, and when she had approached within a few feet she stopped abruptly and gave back the stare with interest.

She was a woman of gigantic proportions, standing fully six feet in height, and the Indian blood in her veins was evident in her stern, dark face and the stiff black hair that fell like wire around her shoulders.

Her garments were quite in keeping with her face, for they consisted of leather moccasins, short flannel skirts and a dirty yellow blanket.

When she had decided that the detective could not possibly harm her she moved a little nearer and made a grimace which Duncan could only answer by winking rapidly.

A moment later, much to his relief, she twisted her fingers into the handkerchief between his lips and wrenched it off.

"Now, talk," she commanded, in a deep, guttural voice.

"Thank you! I'll tell anything you want to know," said Duncan, with a yawn of relief. "And if you'll untie my hands and feet I'll do even better. I'll give you every cent I have in my pocket."

The woman needed no urging, and in a minute he was free and emptying the contents of his purse into the woman's pocket.

"Come! Let's get away from here," were his first word after fulfilling his promise. "That cutthroat will be back looking for me in a minute. Do you know the way to the Red Cut Tavern?"

It was the only house of any kind that the detective knew to be in that vicinity, and, as he asked the question, he looked at the woman anxiously.

Instantly a savage look sprang into her eyes, and she began shaking her head vigorously.

Then she started on a run toward the farmhouse, beckoning for Duncan to follow her, but as he had been relieved of his weapons and cartridge belt the detective was not over anxious to venture in that direction.

"Hold on! I am unarmed! We'd be running our necks into a noose to go back there now. It will be daylight in half an hour, so we can't hide from those fellows!" he shouted.

The woman wheeled around and came back a few paces; then astonished him by pulling a magnificent Colt's revolver from under her blanket, and as she forced it into his hand she showed him another.

"By Jove! Where in thunder did you get that?" he asked, curiously. "Who are you, anyway, and what are you doing in this vicinity?"

Without replying the woman suddenly ducked her head and made a dive for a clump of bushes, and Duncan, taking the hint, promptly followed her example.

Jesse James and Clell were coming back, both riding like demons, and in a second the detective was able to discern the reason of their haste, for three members of the sheriff's posse were pursuing them.

The two outlaws passed the spot where they had left him tied to a tree at a breakneck speed, and as they passed Duncan could see that they each had a weapon aimed in that direction.

The blank look upon their faces when they saw that he was not there would have done him good if he could have seen it, but, even as it was, he chuckled at what he knew must have been their disappointment.

"The ruffians meant to finish me with a flying shot," he muttered under his breath, and just then the other three riders dashed by like a whirlwind.

The moment they were out of sight the woman crept out of the bushes, and, with a series of grunts for him to follow, she made straight for the farmhouse.

There was not a sign of life visible when they reached there, and the row of sheds were only a heap of smoldering ashes.

The Indian woman searched everywhere, both inside and outside of the building, and when she finally discovered a scarf that belonged to Miss Collins she hugged and kissed it in a perfect transport of agony.

"Now, then, madam, what will we do next?" asked Duncan when their search was ended. "There's no one here that needs our assistance, and as the sheriff was in this scrap himself we are under no obligations to bury these bodies. The thing is to find Miss Collins and my partner, Mr. Davis, and we can't do either by staying here, that's certain."

The woman seemed to see the sense in his remarks, and once more taking the lead she left the side door of the building and began following the tracks around a large clump of bushes.

Duncan watched her carefully when they passed the old well, but after a quick look at the hoof prints she turned in another direction and he could see that it was the tracks made by a man's bootheels that she was following.

Suddenly she gave a sharper grunt and pointed to the

tracks where the bootheels had happened to press a smooth bit of clay near a gully.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Duncan. "Is this the rascal that ran away with the girl? By Jove! I believe it is! There's where he mounted his horse yonder."

He had caught a glimpse of horses' hoofs on the other side of the little gully and the imprint before him showed that a man had braced himself to jump across, the peculiar backward tip to the heels showing that he carried a burden.

The Indian woman's face was growing ashen with rage, and her eyes shot fire as she answered his questions.

"He's got her! Red Fox got her! Come! Me knows den where he hide my baby. Me steal her back. Curse um! Come!"

Duncan needed no urging to go to the rescue of Miss Collins, but it was a wild undertaking which the creature set for him.

He felt very sure now that the old Indian woman had been in charge of Miss Collins when the outlaws stole her, and for months, even years, the wretched creature may have been trying to rescue her.

He decided that her efforts should be rewarded if it was in the power of man, but the bullet scratch on his leg was beginning to get uncomfortable and he was obliged to stop and take a look at it.

The woman bound it up for him in a skillful manner, but it was plainly to be seen that she was impatient even at such a necessary delay, and Duncan was sufficiently fascinated with Miss Collins himself to thoroughly appreciate her intense anxiety.

It was broad daylight now, and the country over which they were hurrying was becoming more densely wooded, a fact which Duncan observed with some trepidation, for he had no compass and was entirely unacquainted with the locality.

However, as the woman seemed to know her way, he followed silently, and an hour later, when they seemed in the very solitude of a forest of pines and hemlocks, they came suddenly upon a small log cabin.

Without once pausing to see if any one was about, the woman cocked her pistol and strode to the door, which stood open.

Duncan was close behind her, and as he glanced sharply over her shoulder he gave a cry of delight.

Davis was inside, his hands and feet bound tightly with vines, but otherwise uninjured, to judge from appearances.

CHAPTER VI.

THE IDENTITY OF MISS COLLINS.

"Hello, old man! By the Lord! I'm glad to see you again! I was dead sure that some of those rascals had killed you."

"Same here, Duncan. I never expected to see you again. Cut me loose quick, old chap, and I'll tell you something."

Davis was eying the Indian woman curiously as he spoke, and as Duncan cut his bonds he explained rapidly how he met her.

"She's just the guide that we are in need of, I'm thinking," he went on, as the Indian woman, after seeing that they were friends, began searching the cabin.

"She is evidently an old nurse of Miss Jean's and loves her devotedly, and, say, perhaps she doesn't hate that fellow Red Fox! By the way, have you come across such an individual, Davis?"

"On the contrary, he came across me," growled Davis, shaking himself free. "I was waiting for you under that tree when the wretch lassoed me and jerked me out of the saddle. The next I knew I was lying here in this cabin and the fellow was tying my feet together."

"Then he can't have been the one that stole Miss Collins."

"I'm not so sure. I caught a glimpse of his horse as he rode away and there was something huddled up on it that looked like a woman."

The Indian woman's eyes gleamed savagely as she listened to his words, but Duncan noticed that the name of "Miss Collins" did not seem to interest her, and it occurred to him that there was even more mystery in this matter than he had imagined.

"I was too dazed to notice much," went on Davis, "but I'm all right now, in my head, I mean, and they'll be back pretty quick, so we must be ready for them."

"Looks as if I got here just in time, old man. How is your arm getting on? I got a scratch on the leg this morning."

"It's pretty stiff. I'd like to have a clean rag on it, if the thing was possible, but I suppose it isn't," was the answer, when the woman interrupted:

"Me fix um. Quick! Take off coat," she said abruptly.

Davis pulled off his coat and the strange creature drew a bottle from her pocket and emptied some of the contents on his arm, and in less than five minutes it felt cool and comfortable.

Then once more she devoted herself to examining the cabin, and at last a series of triumphant grunts showed that she had found something.

She came toward the detectives holding up a paper that she had found under a flat stone, and at a glance Duncan

saw that there was writing on it. Taking it to the door he read the scrawl aloud while his companions listened.

"The sheriff hez cornered Jess, but I've got the gal. Am takin' her ter ther Red Cut Tavern. You'll find company in ther cabin when yer git hyar, and the capt'n sez yer ter keep him tied till further orders," read the message.

"Indeed! Well, I'm glad you got here before he did," said Davis, as he finished.

"That tells us where Miss Collins is, anyway," was Duncan's rejoinder. "It's pretty quick work, that's all I have to say. The outlaw gang must be pretty well organized in this section. Hello! Here's something more on the other side of the paper!"

Once more he deciphered the careless scrawl, and a whistle escaped his lips as he learned its purport.

"By Jove! That's cool! They are going to try robbing Watts of his gold again to-night. Listen!" he said, excitedly: "This thing says:

"Be at the bend at half-past eleven to-night. Jess has er plan ter ship ther dust ter ther Coyote station in er coffin. Ther'll be plenty of stiffs by thet time, so the thing is possible."

"Curse them! They're a coldblooded lot!"

"I move that we vacate these premises before the cut-throats get back," said Duncan suddenly. "We don't know who these orders are for or whether they have been executed, and we're likely to be surrounded and shut in like rats in a trap."

They both moved toward the door, but were quickly halted by the Indian woman, who had been standing just outside taking a sharp look around the cabin.

"Sh! Me hear um! Quick! Put on these! No one touch Multamulta! Go! Me stay and shoot Red Fox! Me hate him! Curse him!"

As she spoke she tossed her blanket to Davis and then began peeling off her skirts, of which she seemed to have an unusual number.

Davis ripped the blanket in half and gave part to his chum, and then they both put one of the woman's flannel skirts over their shooting jackets and Davis even traded his shoes for the leather moccasins.

A moment later they slid out of the cabin door and into the bushes, but not until they had both urged the woman to accompany them.

"Me stay," was the only answer to their entreaties, and a grim smile actually overspread the old creature's face as she crouched behind a pile of rubbish in one corner of the cabin.

"Now, then, give 'em the Indian lingo, and don't forget to ask for firewater," whispered Duncan, as they waited in the bushes. "I haven't played Indian for some time, but this is serious business! Let them once see our faces and our goose is cooked, partner!"

There was a low crackling of bushes which grew louder and louder, and at last the detectives saw two horsemen approaching the cabin from just the opposite direction from which they had reached it.

"That gives me the points of the compass," muttered Duncan. "Red Cut Tavern is directly north, and that is where they have come from! Gee! That head one is Red Fox, all right! Get on to his whiskers!"

The outlaw who rode ahead was indeed "Red Fox," so named because of his flaming beard and his crafty nature.

He was one of Jesse James' right-hand men, for the bandit could depend upon him to do any dirty work that there might be on hand, for Red Fox would stop at nothing to earn a dollar.

It was apparent that, early in the day as it was, the two ruffians had been drinking heavily, and, just before they reached the cabin, they each had a pull at a black bottle.

Then halting their horses, they took a careful survey of the bushes, without, however, discovering the detectives.

"Jess hez set us a hard job as usual," said Red Fox, after a minute. "I've got ther gal caged and ther suspect is in ther cabin, and now he expects me ter drive ther char coffin ter ther station."

"Bah! Thet thar's nothin' ter what he's set fer me ter do," said the other. "After scoutin' round all night, I'm ter stand treat at ther Gulch all day, and, by ther looks of ther sun, I'd better be a movin'!"

"I reckon he don't know ther Gulch as well as he nout! Thar's men thar thet kin stand all ther lickin' Jess James kin put up, an' 'twon't rattle them nuther so's out what they kin pull er trigger."

"Them's my orders just ther same, an' you know Jess," remarked the other. "What he sez is law, and thar's no arguin' agin it! What's ter be done with ther suspect tender?"

He nodded toward the cabin as he spoke, and the other outlaw shook his head before replying.

"If I hed my way I'd fill him full of lead and call it quar—what's the use wastin' time on er white-livered tenderfoot. If it's er detective, Jesse will hev his own peculiar method of killin' him, I reckon, while if he's ally only a tenderfoot prospector, he'll be let off with a reminder."

"In ther shape of er bullet! Jess thinks one bullet on't count, specially if it's thro' ther heart furst clip," laughed the other, coarsely; then the two moved on a few paces nearer to the cabin.

"By the etarnel! He's gone!" roared Red Fox, as he got a look in at the door.

The other outlaw took a sharp look inside of the cabin, and then, like a flash, Red Fox turned his horse's head and made a detour of the rude building.

"Thar ain't hide nor hair on him to be seen," he said, as he came back. "Look thar, Bilkes! the cuss hez took ter ther woods as sure as shootin'! Thar's two broken bushes right egzactly behind ye!"

Bilkes turned his head to look at the broken bushes, and as he did so there was a crack of a revolver inside of the cabin.

He had been directly before the door and the Indian woman could wait no longer. At the very first shot the fellow reeled from his saddle. The horse snorted with fear and dashed away, and, in an instant, Red Fox turned and dashed away through the bushes, leaving his fallen companion writhing on the ground in front of the cabin.

The two detectives waited until the fellow was out of sight; then, while Davis went after the horse, Duncan called softly to the woman.

She came out at once and the two of them dragged the man inside of the cabin, for the fellow was dying.

"Now, then, stranger, tell me who that girl is, Miss Collins, I mean? I'll let you lie here and die like a dog if you don't!" said Duncan, sternly.

The fellow raised his head, and, for a moment, he seemed inclined not to reply, but catching a glimpse of the Indian woman's face he changed his mind and, pointing straight at the strange creature, he gasped:

"Ask her, if yer want ter know! It's against ther rules of ther gang! I'll die 'fore I'll tell ye!"

He dropped back as he spoke and the blood spurted from his wound. A minute later he was cold and breathless.

The Indian woman gave a satisfied grunt and then started for the door to look for Red Fox, but Duncan hurried and overtook her.

"Hold on, there! Answer me a question! Are you sure it's Miss Collins you are looking for?" he asked.

The woman looked dazed and tried to think a minute, then she shook her head sternly and knit her black brows together.

"Me look for her, Miss Jennie," she said, distinctly. "She from Laramie City! Jesse James, he steal her!"

"What! Miss Jennie Colchester!" burst out Davis, who had caught the horse and had returned in time to hear the statement.

The poor creature looked at him sharply and there was no mistaking the fact that the name was familiar to her.

The two detectives stared at each other, for here was a startling discovery. They were trying to prevent one evil deed and were in a fair way to explain another.

"Jennie Colchester was stolen by the James gang seven years ago!" burst out Davis. "This woman is right! She found the young lady's scarf and fairly wept

over it! No doubt it was a relic of early days! Let me see it, madam!"

The woman pulled the scarf out of her bosom and allowed them to look at it, but she would not release her hold of it for a second.

"It's silk, and very thin and worn. No doubt she had it on when she was stolen. I hope you realize the importance of guarding it safely," said Duncan, turning to the woman.

The woman's beady eyes gleamed with a crafty look and she folded the scarf carefully and put it back in her bosom.

"We are on the right track! The girl first and the gold afterward!" exclaimed Davis, as they left the cabin.

With the Indian woman in her short skirt, a loose blouse waist and the detective's shoes, acting as guide, the three made their way slowly through the woods until they were obliged to halt and look around for some breakfast.

They had succeeded in convincing the woman that Miss Collins and her "Jennie" were one and the same girl, although they were not altogether sure of it themselves, and her eagerness to go on made her proof against weariness, and no inducement of the tired detectives could make her stop and rest.

It was nearly dusk when they finally emerged upon a fairly good road and saw the cut between the rocks known as "Red Cut," just a little ahead, and the dim outlines of a ramshackle old tavern backing up against the boulders.

The Indian woman had guided them over a route that kept them well out of sight of the few houses in that locality, but between them and the tavern were a couple of huts, and, before they ventured to pass them, the detectives held a short consultation behind some bushes.

"There's no use going on as we are, for we're all three done up," was Duncan's comment. "We wouldn't be one, two, three in a scrimmage now, so I move that we lie and rest until dark, and then take a chance at the tavern barroom."

"A wise proceeding, old man! My arm aches badly! An hour later we can move around in these togs and be comparatively safe, but if any of the natives should see us now they'd lynch us as sure as shooting, and I can't say that I would blame them!"

The woman now agreed with her usual stolidity, and then the three chose hiding-places in the bushes, a few yards from the road and about ten paces apart from each other.

A storm was brooding and darkness fell rapidly, but, for over an hour, the detectives slept soundly while the woman never closed her eyes or took her finger from the trigger of her weapon.

At last her anxiety to go on made her rustle the bushes, and, as Duncan awoke with a start, he found her looking down at him.

"Now go on! Three men, Red Fox, Humpty Dave and Jesse James have passed," she whispered, softly. "We go now and save her, my baby Jennie!"

"Jesse James has passed! Is that possible?" answered Duncan, springing to his feet.

"Sh! Listen!" said the woman, putting her hand on his shoulder.

Sounds of rude laughter, ribald songs and coarse profanity were issuing from the tavern, and the place, instead of being in darkness, as it was an hour before, was now as brilliantly lighted as kerosene lamps could light it.

"Ha! Jess must have been expected! Who is the landlord yonder?" asked the detective, touching Davis to wake him.

An ugly scowl darkened the woman's face, and she raised the ugly weapon that she carried and fondled it as she answered:

"Jess runs it! The tavern his! Horses his! Fire-water his! Bad man! Bad place!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE RED CUT TAVERN.

"Which of the cutthroats is Jess? I can't make him out," whispered Davis, a little later, as he and Duncan stood close together, peering through the shutters of one of the windows of the tavern.

"Hanged if I can tell! They all look alike to me!"

The two detectives put their ears to the shutters and a volley of Rocky Mountain profanity greeted them. Then a voice that they knew belonged to Jesse James began calling out the names of his men as though he wished to be sure they were all together.

"Hello, there, Nick Gibson! Let up on that booze or it'll be the worse for you! Here you, Bones, shut up that gawp and listen, will you? Where's Bill and Arizona Jim? They said they'd be here this evening!"

"Hyar we are, cap'n! Never known ter fail yer yet, wuz we! I reckon with er prize like thet thar gold in sight, thar won't none of yer men go back on yer, Jess, but yer ain't made us no promise yet about ther divvy!"

"That's so, Jess! What are we goin' ter get out of it?" bawled another voice. "We know yer square and fair, but it's good to know what's comin'! It's better'n a pocket flask to keep the fightin' edge on a feller!"

"You'll get your share, every one of you, but we haven't won the game yet, and, besides, there's another deal on to-night that you haven't heard of! It's a chance to add a couple of hundred apiece to your share this evening!"

"Whoop! Thet's ther talk! Jess allus hez some-thin' new up his sleeve! Let's hev it, cap'n!" bawled a chorus of voices.

"One thing at a time! Hello, where's Frank? Get a move on there, Bob Snyder, and see if you can find my brother!"

"I'm here! Where'd you spose I'd be, Jess?" answered Frank James' voice from a distant corner of the barroom, and the rattle of dice followed as an accompaniment.

"Put up the dice then, and attend to business," was the answer, and then something slammed against the wall as though the outlaw had kicked a chair across the barroom.

"A nice lot! I can see our finish!" laughed Davis, the detective, outside the window, during the momentary lull, then he moved an inch or two from the shutter and peered through the darkness.

"Now, where the devil did that woman go?" he asked, in a whisper. "She wouldn't be such a fool as to go in there, would she?"

"I should hope not! Go and find her, Davis, while I listen! There'll be scouts out before long, so we must keep together."

Davis moved away softly and Duncan again put his eye to the shutter.

He counted the outlaws, for the lamps were so arranged that he could see almost the entire room, and the men themselves were grouped around small tables, and bound to his relief that no one was missing.

Then he put his ear back to the broken slat that he had found in the shutter and discovered that he had missed a bit of important information.

"The Gulch is all right, I tell you," Jesse James was saying. "I gave Bilkes and Red Fox orders to buy whisky for every cuss in that vicinity, and they're doin' yet, I reckon, or they'd be here this evening."

"They'd orter be hyar now, drunk or sober," spoke up one of the men, "but p'raps them mules of ther Foxes is uncommon stubborn this evenin'!"

There was a roar at this, but Jesse James replied unsily:

"Red Fox can usually be depended on when you rasls can't," he said, with a steely glance at one of his number. "There's Nick, for instance, he's a traitor, Nick is! He'd cut my throat in a minute if he dared!"

"Come, Jess! It's time to be moving!" called Frank James at that minute. "If we stay here any longer, these lows will be too drunk to budge. Who is going for the sheriff's body?"

"I told the Fox to have a team at the dugout at midnight. The sheriff was from St. Louis, and it's only natural his friends should want his body!" was the cold-

blooded answer, and then Jesse James could be heard thumping with his pistol butt on one of the tables to call the men to order.

"See here, Jim! put up those bottles! Not another drink goes into one of those tanks to-night! Shut up the bar and close the tavern; then, Frank, you look after things while I go upstairs a minute!"

"Haw! haw! Ther bird's upstairs! Jess has had her caged up there all day. It's a wonder he gave us his company this evenin'," roared Nick Gibson, coarsely.

The sound of a bottle whirling through the air and cracking against a human skull came distinctly to Duncan's ears, then Jesse James gave vent to a roar like thunder.

"Take that back, you cur, or I'll wring your neck! The young lady upstairs is not to be insulted by any one. She's the ward of my wife and I am her protector!"

"I'm sure I meant nothing," groaned Nick, who was thoroughly frightened. "How was I ter know ther gal was a relation!"

"Then shut your mouth till you do know!" roared the outlaw. "You'll let off your mouth once too often, Nick Gibson, and then I'll tattoo you with lead!"

"Jess is on ther rampage ter-night! Look out for him!" said one of the other men, daringly, as the bandit king started for a door that led to an upper chamber.

"Better be a bit careful yourself, Bob Snyder, as I'm not at all particular whom I shoot," warned the outlaw.

"I kin match yer at er trigger, if it comes ter thet thar," went on Bob, who was much the worse for liquor.

There was the crack of a revolver and a howl of pain followed, and Duncan put his eye to the shutter quick enough to see the fellow clap his hand to his ear, where a bullet had pierced it.

"Better not rile the capt'n ag'in, Bob! Ain't ye learned better'n that?" asked another voice.

Jesse James had turned his back upon his men and was striding for the door, and, instead of changing, Duncan kept his eye to the shutter. Something, he did not know what, induced him to turn his glance toward the outer door of the barroom, and, a second later, he saw it open.

A low cry of horror burst from his lips as he saw the Indian woman burst into the room and reel across the floor, as if she were as drunk as any of them.

"What on earth will come now?" was the thought that flashed through his mind, and then he did not wait to see more, but left his post and darted around to the front door of the tavern.

He was for bolting in after her, but, just at the steps, Davis grabbed him and fairly yanked him back into the shadow of a stunted hemlock. "Sh! Let her alone! She knows what she's about!" warned Davis. "Here,

tain your face with this and pull down the corners of your mouth a little! It may not help much, but it may let 'em guessing!"

He handed him a rag that seemed to be wet in something, and the detective lost no time in mopping it over his features.

They had both sacrificed their mustaches on one of their last cases, so, when their skin was darkened and laubed, they did not look unlike half-breeds.

"Now, come on! We must go in and see the old lady safely through! She's determined to get a look at that girl, and we must help her do it!"

"I won't be sorry to get another glimpse of her myself," muttered Duncan, under his breath.

"Oh, I saw you were badly hit! I wish you success, old man, but unfortunately at present your case does not look very propitious."

"Sh! There's some one coming! It's that fellow, Nick Gibson!"

"Scouting, I suppose! The Injun woman has scared them! Wait till he comes ten feet nearer! Now! At him, Duncan!"

The two sprang forward simultaneously, without a sound, and, before the fellow could pull a trigger, they had their hands on his mouth and a grip on his throat.

It was something of a struggle, for neither of the detectives were in good condition, but they finally succeeded in choking the fellow into a condition of insensibility that they hoped would be lasting.

Not a sound had been made that could be heard inside of the tavern, and, tucking their revolvers under their blankets, they opened the door and entered.

The door opened directly into a wide hall, with a low flight of stairs at one end and the door leading to the barroom on the right, and, as they saw the stairs, the detectives whispered together a minute. Then Davis quietly mounted the stairs to inspect the chambers above and Duncan stepped boldly into the barroom.

His appearance was greeted with a howl of surprise, and, in less than a minute, the outlaws surrounded him.

"Hello! Who in thunder is this?" was the first exclamation.

"What's Nick doin' outside, anyhow? I thought he was scoutin'! Looks as if he wasn't tryin' very hard ter keep strangers outer ther tavern!"

"Look him over, boys! It's a man all right!" ordered Frank James. "That petticoat don't fit worth a cent, if I'm any judge, and whoever saw a woman with such a pair of shoulders!"

Some one caught Duncan by the shoulder at that minute and tried to pull off his blanket, but the detective let out swiftly and hit him a clip under the jaw, at the same time giving vent to a string of Indian profanity.

"Better not touch him! He's hot stuff!" roared one of the outlaws, and then they all pounced on the detective and tore off his skirt and blanket.

When he first entered the room, the attention of all the ruffians had been centered on the Indian woman, but, upon Duncan's appearance, they had turned from her and the strange creature made good use of her opportunities.

Darting across the room, she picked up a brace of loaded pistols that lay on a table and taking care not to hit Duncan, she blazed away at the outlaws.

"Whoop! Let up, thar! Stop it! We can't shoot er woman, ef she is er redskin!" bawled one.

A yell of agony followed, and one of the men went down, while three or four made a dive to get under the tables.

Duncan was free in a second, but he dared not move for fear the excited woman would put a bullet through him. Almost before he could collect his wits, the one-sided battle was over.

Two of the men had rushed forward at the risk of their lives and grabbed her by the arms, but not before she had winged two more of their number.

"Now, whar is Jess! Call him down, some on yer!" cried one of the woman's captors.

"Thar's somethin' wrong up thar. If thar wasn't, he'd er been down at ther fust pop of ther pistol! Go up, some on yer, and see what's ter pay! Me and Bob kin take care of this hyar crazy critter!"

Duncan had pulled himself together by this time, but he was a sorry-looking specimen, for the men had torn not only the blanket, but his shooting jacket, to fragments, and he now stood before them clad only in a flannel shirt and trousers.

The stain on his face disfigured him completely, and even Frank James looked him over without a sign of recognition.

As one of the men started up the stairs in search of Jesse James, he dropped into a chair and relapsed into a true Indian silence, while the men crawled out from under the tables and once more surrounded him.

The Colt's revolver that he was carrying in his belt had dropped out during the scuffle, and Frank James was now examining it carefully.

The Indian woman had become quiet also, even allowing her captors to tie her hands together, and as Duncan glanced toward her, he became aware that he was being guarded by no less than three weapons in the hands of outlaws stationed at different places in the barroom.

It was a great satisfaction to know that none of the men knew him, for he might now be considered one of the innumerable half-breeds which were roaming through

the West from Mexico to Canada, and who were usually accompanied by one or more of their women.

He decided to keep up the sullen aspect which he had adopted, not only because it showed the natural Indian characteristics, but because it would obviate the necessity of talking, a thing which he knew would sooner or later betray him.

While he was doing his thinking, a tremendous racket could be heard upstairs, then the man who had gone up after the outlaw pitched headlong down the stairs and landed full length in the barroom.

"Haw! haw! Jess kicked him down! Now, what thunder is keepin' ther cap'n!" laughed some one.

"I reckon he thinks we was havin' er little scrap among ourselves and didn't want ter interfere! 'Taint nowise unusual fer Jess ter hear pistols crackin'!" said Bob Snyder.

"Jess ought to come down if he expects to get to the lch on time," remarked Frank James. "I'll call him self!"

He glanced at the fellow who had landed so precipitously on the barroom floor after coming in contact with the outlaw's foot, and the others set up a laugh which ended as suddenly as it began.

Crack!

Crack!

The two pistol shots sounded from the room directly above their heads, and, at the same time, Duncan sprang to his feet and made a dash for the stairway.

"Get back, thar! Another step and yer a deader!" roared one of the marksmen, at the same time snapping the trigger on an empty chamber of his weapon.

Duncan unwillingly returned to his chair.

He felt sure that Davis was in mortal combat with the outlaw.

There was a silence like death in the barroom for a minute, and then the voice of Miss Collins, or Jennie West, whichever she was, rang out from the room above with cutting clearness.

"You are a monster, Jesse James, to maltreat a woman! Those papers are mine, and you shall not have them!"

"A! ha! It's too late now, my pretty Jean!" came the bandit's wickedest voice. "You had your chance, didn't you kill me! Now, what do you want of those papers, anyway?"

Duncan grated his teeth and clenched his fists, but he knew it would be fatal to move a muscle.

He could only sit helplessly within the sound of her voice and hear the brave girl defend him.

When her voice sounded again, there was a ring of triumph in it, as if the strain she was undergoing was fast driving her senses.

"God knows I tried to kill you, Jesse James!" she said, bitterly. "I could not help it when you touched the papers, and oh, I would kill you if I could, as wicked as it is, if I could only keep those two men from your clutches!"

"You'll not get the chance again, for I shall keep your pistol now," was the outlaw's answer; then followed some words in a lower tone, and then the girl's voice rose again in frantic expostulation.

"I will not, Jesse James! I will not live beneath your roof another day! It is wicked? It is outrageous! I am a gentleman's daughter and not the companion of outlaws! I will kill myself before I will do what you wish! Oh, if those two brave men were only here! I am sure they would save me!"

"They'll have all they can do to save themselves without bothering about you when they cross my path again," roared the outlaw, savagely; then a door slammed, a rusty key grated in the lock and Jesse James strode down the stairs into the barroom, carrying two small packets of papers.

CHAPTER VIII.

COYOTE GULCH.

Duncan steeled himself to be prepared for what followed, and in reality his chief concern was for the brave young girl whom he feared might be desperate enough to put her suicidal threat into execution. He could not imagine what had become of Davis, but as the thought popped into his head that perhaps his chum had also heard what took place in the chamber above and might even now be planning to release the girl, a great feeling of relief swept over him.

Jesse James paused in the doorway as he caught sight of the two strangers in the barroom, and Frank James hurried to make full explanations.

"This squaw drifted in just after you went upstairs," he began. "She appeared to be drunk, but she sobered up all of a sudden when she saw a brace of pistols on the table."

"Didn't any one go outside and stand guard?" roared the outlaw.

"I sent Nick out as soon as this woman came in, and that makes me think. We ain't seen hide nor hair of him since, and yet this fellow came in five minutes later."

"He was rigged out in petticoats, too, Jess, when he came in," broke in Bob Snyder, "but it didn't take us long to ketch on ter his sex an' thar's his pop lyin' on ther bar yonder!"

Jesse James took a step forward and glared angrily at Duncan, but the detective drew a breath of relief as he saw that, in spite of his eagle glance, the outlaw did not know him.

"Hold on to him, boys, till I place him," he said, after looking him over carefully.

"One of those cursed detectives is loose in these diggings, and there's never any telling what kind of disguises they're wearing!"

"There was two on 'em, warn't thar?" asked one of the men.

"Yes, but Red Fox has got one of 'em safe and sound—the one who cut loose from me this morning, when those three Gulch fellows were after me. I reckon he's on his way to the Gulch by this time, and it's nowise unlikely that he'd stop at the tavern."

"Specially if he knew you was hyar, Jess!"

"The more fool he!" muttered the outlaw, giving Duncan another hawklike look. "Where in thunder did this giantess come from?"

He turned toward the Indian woman, who rose as he spoke, and, as the air was thick with smoke, she bent forward to scan his features.

"So you don't know me, Jesse James! Well, that ain't strange, seeing you never saw me before!" she remarked, in excellent English.

"Perhaps you'll remember my name, though, when I tell you I am Marion Tennafl, the half-breed nurse who was in charge of Jennie Colchester the day one of your infamous gang abducted her at Laramie City!"

"It's a lie! My men never abducted Jennie Colchester!" bellowed the outlaw. "We got the name of it, though, just because we were in Laramie City at the time! This girl is Jean Collins, and she's a niece of Dick Little's wife, who was Mattie Collins before she was married, so you are on the wrong scent, old woman, and you'd better abandon it!"

"Never! I will find her, Jesse James! You shall not stop me! No, neither you nor your whole band of cutthroats and robbers!"

"Bah! Shut your mouth, you squaw, or I'll have one of the men gag you! If you didn't wear petticoats, I'd fill you full of bullets and use you for a scarecrow, but, as it is, I have more important business to attend to! Give the woman a bed in the cellar, Jim, and turn the key on her! I'll find time to-morrow, perhaps, to investigate her story!"

He turned his back on her as he finished and the fellow he called Jim promptly took her by the shoulder and jerked her, yelling and kicking, out into the hall and down into the moldy cellar of the tavern.

Duncan felt more helpless than ever, but it was impossible to stir, knowing, as he did, that three weapons were leveled at his heart and that Jesse James himself was a little suspicious of him.

"It's time we were off, Jess!" urged Frank James

again, but his words were greeted with a howl of rage from his brother.

He had ripped open the two packets with the point of his knife, and immediately two detectives' badges were ringing to the table.

"Ha! ha! So he was a civil engineer, was he? A gentleman's son come West to do a little prospecting! He roared the outlaw. "So! Mr. Herbert McAllister, I've found you out! You are a Pinkerton bloodhound and my worst enemy!"

The words were intermingled with blood-curdling profanity, and Duncan, sitting ten feet away, had to make tremendous effort to preserve the Indian stolidity which he had assumed for the occasion.

"Curse the whelps! If I only had 'em here!" yelled Jesse James, sticking his knife into the table. "By the eternal! I'd cut out their hearts! I'd flay them alive and feed the wolves with their carcasses!"

"Hello, Jess! Come, quick! Nick's been murdered as sure as shooting!" yelled some one outside of the tavern at just that minute.

There was a general rush for the door by every man but one, and he remained to guard Duncan until the excitement was over.

When they came in, dragging Nick after them, Duncan breathed a little easier, for, as the outlaw was dead, he could tell no secrets.

Another arrival at the tavern just then once more stirred up the excitement, for it was no one of less importance than Red Fox, the custodian of the cabin in the forest.

Duncan pricked up his ears to hear what tale this fellow would tell, and could hardly conceal his delight at the fellow's lying story.

"We hed ter shoot him, cap'n," he said, as soon as he could make himself heard. "Ther rascal wriggled himself loose and was er hidin' in ther cabin and poor Bilkes got er bullet through his head, so I didn't do no foolin'. I jest let him hev it straight and then let ther catermounts hev his body."

"Good enough for him, if he was really er Pinkerton man," said one.

"Too good for him altogether!" growled Jesse James. "I'm glad he's out of the way, but I'd like to have dealt with him."

"We'll run across the other one, mebbe, cap! Then you kin vent yer spite fer both on ther one," remarked another.

Duncan heard it all, but the men seemed to forget him for a time, all but the one who acted as sentinel. He never took his eyes off of him.

Jesse James shouted for silence, and finally succeeded in making known his orders.

Red Fox had reported that the outlaw's friends at the Gulch were indulging in the wildest kind of a carousal, and thus far, they were in ignorance of the treasure that was hidden in the dugout.

When the sheriff nipped Jesse James' scheme in the night at midnight, he took with him nearly every honest man in the Gulch, so that now John Watts was having a hard time to secure a guard for his treasure. By promising them large sums, he finally inveigled a dozen disreputable characters into guarding the dugout, but, owing to their treacherous natures, the poor man was caught "between two fires," Jesse James and his gang and his own unscrupulous neighbors.

The sheriff's body had been found near the cross roads the early morning and had been carried to the cabin owned by Watts as a dwelling, for the miner was a relative of the sheriff's and was determined that the official should receive a decent burial.

That this day of drunkenness and carousing among the natives of the Gulch was the work of Jesse James was evidently not occurred to him, but in reality it was a trump card which the outlaw was playing to keep the treasure from getting the treasure before him.

He had laid his plans well, and they had all been carried out, so his departure from the tavern was made with a sense of conscious victory.

"Bring that fellow along and make him of use!" he commanded, as he put his head in at the doorway at the last minute. Duncan hated to go and leave Miss Watts, but there was no help for it.

Ten minutes they had left the tavern behind them and were galloping over the hills, Duncan on a mustang and Jesse James and Bob Snyder.

"The fellow knows how to ride all right," laughed Jesse James, as Duncan bent low in the saddle in true cowboy fashion and even allowed his bridle to dangle from the neck of the mustang.

"He's either a bang-up rider or else he's reckless," said some one in the rear. "Thet thar mustang is full of tricks! He's likely ter bolt at any minute, an' if he bolts on these hyar hills it's all day with ther Injun!"

"I save us the trouble of killing him," laughed Jesse James, "but there ain't any fear, Dick! You can't kill a redskin!"

"I ain't so sure of his color as all that," was the reply. "I'd be a tarnal sight surer if some 'ud jest locate thar tother sleuthhound!"

"I'll show up at the Gulch, if this ain't him," was the careless answer. "Time enough to bother him when we're sure of him. Just at present I'm busy about getting that money. If this deal don't work, I'll quit Wyoming to-morrow!"

"You mayn't hev ther chance, Jess!" laughed Bob

Snyder, dryly. "Thar is sech er thing as gettin' shot, you know! You've done purty well so far, but yer time is comin'!"

"Bah! I ain't worrying about that, Bob Snyder! No man has ever got a bead on Jesse James yet! I'll live to see you all hung, and don't you forget it!"

"Did yer leave some one ter guard ther gal, Jess?" asked another voice, suddenly.

"Sure! Jim has charge of the tavern and Red Fox is looking after the outside. No fear but what we'll find the women when we want them! Now, then, Bob, you take the cross cut around the Gulch, while I go up the main road," he continued. "There's four of the men to go with you, while I take the other three and this mongrel!"

He turned almost at right angles as he spoke and dashed down a steep hill with three of his men and Duncan following.

The night was as black as ink, but, in the distance, an occasional light was twinkling and here and there among the rocks glowed red signal lanterns.

They were nearing Coyote Gulch, and, just at the entrance to the wide gorge between two hills, in which the shanties of the miners were located, Jesse James turned in his saddle and gave his final orders.

"Take a look in at Murphy's saloon, Bones, and see what's goin' on! You sneak around to the side window of Yellow Jack's gambling den and find out who's there, Bill! You can patrol the street from Murphy's to the dugout, Ike, and if there's any loitering about give me three short whistles. Let's see, what time does the dummy leave Coyote station?"

"There's a shipment of ore going over the track at two o'clock, and it's nearly one now," was the answer. "Watts has fixed it up with the engineer to take the sheriff's coffin to the smelting works, and they're ter send it on to ther railroad ter-morrer. The thing now is ter git it ter ther dugout, and I reckon thet thar'll be easy when yer plan's set goin', cap'n!"

"There's no one will prevent the removal of the sheriff's coffin," chuckled Jesse James, "and, if we load the stuff right, no one will guess what's in it! Once get it out safe and the rest is easy! Come on, you mongrel!"

He turned to Duncan as he spoke, and the detective promptly raised up in the saddle and away they went clattering down the Gulch toward the dugout, which was known to be the hiding-place of something like fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold dust.

The detective was a little surprised to note how indifferent the natives of the Gulch were to the appearance of strangers, but the reports of the three men who joined them again in one of the narrow paths leading toward

the foothills, gave him a clearer insight into this indifference. Nineteen natives, principally Italians, Indians and cowboys, were in the saloon, twenty-three, most of them Chinamen and outlaws, were in the gambling den, and forty miners, broncho busters and prospectors, were located in various other saloons, leaving the small number of fourteen protecting the treasure.

"There's a report that you've been killed, Jess! Some one must have started it this morning and Red Fox has kept it up all day," said Frank James, as he joined his brother's party later.

The outlaw rubbed his hands together with satisfaction, and, a minute later, his plan to alarm the Gulch and make away with the treasure was put in action.

Flames sprang suddenly into the air from both ends of the settlement, while a blaze beginning high on the hills began sweeping slowly downward. Shrieks and yells followed, and the public houses began emitting streams of cursing, reeling natives, who thought at first glance that the last day was coming.

No one thought of anything but personal safety at that minute, and, as fast as they could, men seized their strong boxes in their arms and sprang into their saddles, ready to vacate the Gulch as soon as they could see a safe path through the flames.

"Save the sheriff's body!" yelled a voice that Duncan recognized as belonging to Jesse James; then the cry came back: "Save live men and not dead ones!"

As the din increased, the outlaws kept themselves well screened by the cabins, but they added to the pandemonium their yells of "Fire!"

Soon fifty horsemen were swarming through the streets and to the curses of the men were added the shrieks of the few women who had the misfortune to be residents of the Gulch.

"My gold! Save my gold! A thousand dollars to the man who will help me!" yelled a lusty voice, and Jesse James chuckled as he saw Watts, the owner of the treasure, stagger by him.

The man had heard that the robber was dead and had been celebrating by drinking more or less through the evening.

Another burst of flames in another direction was followed by a general rush of hoofbeats toward the upper end of the gully, and a second later, there came a terrific explosion, and Murphy's saloon, with three of the adjoining cabins, were added to the conflagration.

"Now, then, men! fetch the coffin!" ordered Jesse James, as he headed for the dugout, meeting twelve out of the fourteen men fairly tumbling out of the place.

"Run for your lives! They're blowing up the Gulch!" cried one of the men, as he made a bee line for the only dark spot to be seen on the horizon.

"Run yourselves, you fool!" muttered Jesse James, grimly; then, as he heard the measured tread of his men bringing the sheriff's coffin, he forgot Duncan for a minute and bolted into the dugout.

It took the detective about a second to turn his mustang's head and make a break for a crowd of natives that he could hear galloping down the Gulch.

He was riding like a mad man when some one called him by name and, bringing the mustang up with a sharp turn, he saw Davis beside him on the back of a broncho.

"Where are they, the robbers, I mean?" asked Davis, forgetting, in his excitement, to greet his comrade.

"They're in the dugout stowing the gold into that coffin! If we could only stop that gang of 'fraid cats, we might capture every one of them."

"No use trying to do that! Come on, old man, we must do the trick alone! If you want a pop, I'll lend you one! I happen to be overstocked at present!"

He leaned from his saddle and handed his chum a brace of pistols as he spoke, then the two dashed back through the smoke and flame that was drawing dangerously near in the hope of reaching a position where they could pick off the outlaws as they came from the dugout with the coffin between them.

CHAPTER IX.

JESSE JAMES IN A COFFIN.

In less than ten minutes after the first blaze started the outlaws had the Gulch all to themselves, except for the two detectives, who were lurking in the shadow of the dugout.

The snapping and cracking of the blazing hemlock trees that covered the hills on one side of the Gulch outdid all other noises and the lights from the burning buildings made everything confusion to the eye, but, at last Duncan saw a man emerge from the dugout.

At that minute there came a puffing and snorting and the dummy engine passed so near him that the mustang reared and nearly threw him.

"Hi, thar, Bill! Make room for the sheriff's coffin!" shouted the man to the engineer of the little locomotive. "Head her the other way and git on full steam! Watts and his men are a-comin' with ther body!"

"Watts kin come an' be hanged!" roared a voice from the engine. "I wouldn't put back through ther thar blaze fer a live man, much less fer a dead one! If Watts wants ter save ther sheriff's body, he kin put his hand ter ther throttle! I'm off fer a hoss! This hyar spot's too hot ter hold me er minute longer!"

He sprang from his engine as he spoke and made a dash across the street, but a bullet from somewhere dropped him in the middle of the thoroughfare. The next second another man darted from the dugout and, passing within twenty feet of Duncan, sprang onto the engine. Crack went the detective's pistol, and the fellow fell with a bullet in his head. At the same time Davis put a couple of bullets into the first man out of the dugout.

The shots must have alarmed the men who were storing the gold into the coffin, for a third man put his head out just long enough to get a bullet through his temples.

"By ther etarnel! they're after us, Jess!" roared Bob Snyder, dropping his end of one of the bags of gold dust. "I told yer twasn't safe ter fetch us all inside! They've got over ther scare and are coming back, the varmints!"

Five or six shots, fired rapidly from the detectives' pistols, seemed to verify this report, and, for just a second, the outlaws looked at each other.

"Quick! Hustle, boys! I will have it!" roared Jesse James. "The engine is ready and it's only sixty feet to

the track! I'll double your money, if you get it there safely!"

"It can't be done, Jess!" muttered one of the men who had been peering out of the door. "Thar's mounted men twixt us an' ther engine! Bob's right, ther rascals hev come back an' we're caught like rats in er trap!"

Jesse James let out a volley of oaths, and, catching Bob Snyder by the shoulders, he fairly forced him out of the dugout.

"I'll see for myself whether they lie or not!" he growled, and, a second later, a bullet passed between the two, just grazing Bob's elbow.

A howl of rage followed, and Bob turned like a tiger upon his captain, only to be struck squarely in the face by a blow from the fist of the outlaw.

Another bullet settled the question, for Bob fell dead in his tracks and Jesse James, with a livid face, drew back into the dugout.

"Quick! Out there, every one of you! The game is up!" he howled; then, seizing a fellow by the name of Welles, who had only recently joined the gang, he stopped him by main force and drew a bead on him.

"Here! Take my coat and hat! You look enough like me to pass for me easy!" he commanded, at the same time pulling himself out of his coat and forcing it on the fellow.

The new recruit's teeth chattered, but he dared not disobey, and a minute later, when he passed out with the others in the range of the detective's fire, he looked for all the world like the king of bandits.

Both Duncan and Davis gritted their teeth when they saw him, but Davis fired first, and the fellow dropped instantly.

Crack!
Crack!
Flash!
Bang!

The outlaws fired in all directions, then all hands made a break for the little engine.

Duncan's horse had fallen, throwing him on his head, and Davis had been obliged to swing his body low over the side of his own horse to let a bullet go over his head, so the dummy was away with a snort before they could recover.

"They didn't take the gold—that's one good thing!" cried Duncan, as he sprang to his feet, and I'm sure you killed the outlaw, Davis!"

"I hope so! I'll forego the reward for his living carcass gladly!" was the detective's answer, as he dropped from his horse and joined his companion.

The smoke and flame were roaring down the Gulch now, and such a shower of cinders was falling that the two men could not examine the bodies. They had all they could do to coax the one living horse into the dugout and crawl in themselves to avoid the conflagration. The place was hollowed out of solid rock, and had the mountains behind it, so, although the air was stifling, there was no real danger.

Bags of gold dust were piled on one side of the dugout, and, in the semi-darkness, the men could see the outlines of a coffin, but, in the excitement of the minute, it did not occur to them to look in it.

"We balked 'em, all right! They had to leave their booty!" chuckled Davis. "Now, if the fire will only burn

itself out, we'll stand a fair show of getting this stuff to a place of safety."

"That is, unless the outlaw gang runs afoul of the Governor's men. Let's see. When are they due? Nine, to-morrow morning, isn't it?"

"Yes, and the coast is clear now, so I hope they get here. A good mule team and a strong guard, and we have accomplished our errand."

"I wonder what became of Watts," said Duncan, after a minute. "I heard him yelling, 'Save my gold!' The fellow must have been crazy."

"He was drunk, more likely! The story that Jesse James had been killed got into the Gulch to-day, and the fellow lost his head completely! He forgot that there were other rascals besides the James gang in this vicinity."

"By the way, how did you manage to get here, old man?" asked Duncan, suddenly. "The last I saw of you you were climbing the stairs at the Red Cut Tavern."

Davis chuckled as he answered, and at the same time there was a slight sound inside of the coffin, but neither of them noticed it.

"I got lost in the old ranch at first," explained Davis; "then I heard Miss Jean's voice, and got around to her door about ten seconds after Jesse James locked it. You can bet it did not take long to pick that lock, and—well, you can imagine that girl's joy when I told her we were going to save her! And, say, old man, she is Jennie Colchester!"

"Thank God! Poor girl, I am glad we have found her, but did she say she had read poor Barnes' papers?"

"No, she hadn't looked at them! Jesse James saw her holding her dress just over her pocket, and the brute took them away from her by force, after demanding her to release them."

"Who fired the shots?"

"She did. She had a pistol in her pocket, but the poor girl was so nervous that she didn't even scratch him."

"Where is she now, old man?"

Another sound from the coffin escaped their notice, but, as the horse began pawing on the rocky floor of the dugout at that minute, the detective's low reply was heard only by Duncan.

"Red Fox was in a dispute with the bartender when I got her out," went on Davis, softly, "and my only regret was that I was not able to save the Indian woman. Miss Jennie remembers her perfectly, although so many years have passed since she last saw her."

"The poor old creature has been searching for her ever since, I guess. That shows the devotion of the Indian nature," said the other, soberly.

"I guess it's safe to venture out now, old man," said Davis, after a minute. "The smoke seems rolling away and there's no fire left at this end of the gully. Now the question is, What had we better do next? Shall we leave this gold as it is, or pack it in the coffin? It looks pretty heavy for two men, both maimed, to handle."

"I fancy we had better leave it as it is, and my plan would be to get out of this place. I'll feel safer outside than I do in here, inasmuch as those cutthroats are liable to come back any minute."

"All right. Lead the horse out, old man, and I will follow you."

Five minutes later, when they were safely outside, Jesse James raised his head up out of the sheriff's coffin.

He had on his new recruit's jacket and hat, and there was one pistol in his belt, but he shook his head angrily, for the weapon was empty, and there was not a cartridge left with which to reload it.

"Cornered!" he muttered, with a savage oath. "Trapped by a couple of white-livered detectives. Curse them! I'll outwit them yet!"

He swung his legs over the side of the coffin as he spoke, and sat for a moment in profound meditation.

Then he rose to his feet and, taking hold of one of the bags of gold dust, he dragged it to the door of the dugout.

The coffin followed, and to these were added the rest of the bags and considerable old rubbish that he found stowed away in one corner of the dugout.

He had guessed that the detectives would station themselves at quite a distance from the door, and, as the night was a very dark one, they could not see what he was doing.

When it was all done, he had quite a formidable barricade. Then he began searching the dugout for something in the shape of ammunition.

At last he found a rifle and a box of bullets in a crevice of the rocks, and, armed with these, he took up his station at a small hole in his barricade, prepared to pick off any one and every one who attempted to enter the dugout.

He intended to fight game, and one charge of ammunition was carefully set aside to use on himself, in case his enemies overpowered him.

Meanwhile the smoke and flame had rolled on down the Gulch, sweeping everything before it and leaving the little settlement only a long, black stretch of ruins.

The detectives seated themselves behind a rock, where they could command a view both of the dugout and what was once the principal thoroughfare, and, tethering their horses near them, they prepared to await the coming of the mule team and the guard which had been deputed to transport the gold to Cheyenne City.

That John Watts should not have remained by his treasure was a mystery to the two detectives, but when morning broke it was a mystery no longer, for his dead body lay in the bushes, not forty feet from the dugout.

Fortunately for them, neither Davis nor his chum ventured to pass in front of the dugout door, but Duncan, glancing that way, rubbed his eyes a little when he saw that the door had been carefully blocked up during the last two hours of darkness.

"Thunder and lightning! Look there!" he whispered, under his breath. "As sure as shooting, some one was in that coffin, Davis!"

The other detective looked, and a whistle broke from his lips, for the sky was light enough now for him to see the barricade distinctly.

"Well, if we weren't two tenderfeet!" muttered Duncan. "Now, who is he, and why didn't he shoot us? The idiot, whoever he is, had us completely at his mercy!"

"Perhaps he is unarmed," began Davis, when an exclamation from his friend stopped him, for the young man had just caught sight of a rifle barrel protruding from a small opening.

"Curse it! No, he isn't! He's armed to the teeth!

Clap your eye on that Winchester, my boy, if you don't believe it!"

The two stared in amazement, both cursing their stupidity.

"Shall we let him have a volley and tear down his barricade?" began Davis again.

"No, indeed! We'd only waste our bullets! We must wait, old man! If Jesse James' body wasn't right in front of that door, I'd have a look at it."

"I wonder if we can't lasso it and drag it over," suggested Davis.

He looked around as he spoke, but there was nothing in sight that would serve their purpose. The ground, rocks and all were dry, and even warm, where the rushing flames had so recently swept on.

"Ten to one it isn't Jess at all," said Duncan, after a minute. "It's his hat and coat all right, but that doesn't prove anything. Outlaws, as well as detectives, change their clothes occasionally."

"I'm going to satisfy my curiosity some way," said Davis, grimly. "I'm going to take a chance with that marksman yonder and have a look at that body."

He darted forward as he spoke and grabbed the dead man by the legs, and, as he gave him a jerk ahead, "Bang!" went the Winchester.

"Never touched me!" yelled Davis, as a ball whizzed by within an inch of his nose. The next minute he had the body out of range and was examining it leisurely.

"He's a new one! I never had the pleasure of seeing him before," he said, after a minute. "That miserable ruffian has honored him by letting him wear his coat and hat, for no other reason, probably, than to save his own worthless carcass!"

"A lesson for a man to keep out of bad company," laughed Duncan. "But, see here, old man, don't repeat that caper again! I'm not hankering to go on with this case alone, partner!"

Davis laughed, and then gave a yell of delight, as he dragged from an inner pocket of the outlaw's coat two packets of papers.

"Holy smoke! What luck! Our papers and badges! Poor Barnes' paper is there, too. Well, I call that gilt-edged luck!"

"It's the only bit of luck we've had since we started. I'll bet Miss Winchester will be glad when she knows we've got 'em back."

"It proves conclusively that this is Jesse James' coat. The rascal! I'd give a thousand dollars if he was in it at this minute!"

"On the contrary, he is in the dugout yonder, listening to our conversation, no doubt! Well, we've at least got one chance to tell him what we think of him."

"Much good will it do us!" muttered Davis, "but I'll take your advice and not get reckless again, partner!"

Duncan laughed, and then they both pricked up their ears excitedly, for they could hear the little engine coming back, puffing and snorting like a porpoise.

"We're in for it, old man! We're between the devil and the deep sea!" said Davis, quickly. "What's the play, partner? Do we go or stay? We can hide behind this rock, but the horse will betray us!"

"Stay, by all means!" said Duncan, firmly. "One horse would not carry the two of us very far, and, between you and me, old man, I'm anxious to see what's coming!"

"And I'll be in at the death! Count on me every time! Look to your pistols, Dunkey!"

As they spoke, they both backed up against the rock and raised their weapons. Just then the little engine came slowly into view from around a curve in the hill, and the voice of Frank James called out, lustily:

"Hold on there, Bones! Back her a little! Now, then, all hands to the dugout, and a thousand dollars in gold to the man who finds Jess alive! I'll never believe that the curs have killed him!"

"Discretion is the better part of valor! They're six to one! Bolt, Davis!" whispered Duncan, when he saw six forms leap from the tender of the engine.

The next second they were flying down the blackened street, with four out of the six outlaws in hot pursuit, and all yelling like so many Apache Indians.

CHAPTER X.

A MOUNTAIN ROMANCE.

It was a hot race, but a short one, for Davis, happening to see a pile of ruins that were emitting a cloud of impenetrable smoke, shut his lips and eyes tightly and bolted through it, with Duncan close at his heels.

When they finally emerged on the other side they were almost stifled and their feet and legs were covered with burns, but they staggered on, fearing that the outlaws were behind them.

And they would have been had not their horses balked at the smoke, refusing absolutely to be driven through it.

With a curse, Frank James slipped from his saddle and tried to follow, but several minutes had been lost, and the ground was so hot that he was glad to take the advice of his companions and abandon the project.

The two detectives had stumbled into a path that led directly into the hills, and, by following it, they came to a pile of ore, and later to a shaft that had been sunk some fifty feet below the surface.

Davis, who was still in the lead, did not hesitate an instant, but dropped into the shaft, which was fitted with a wooden ladder, and was soon in a drift of iron pyrites. "They can't come down here!" he muttered, as he dropped from sheer exhaustion.

Duncan glanced back up at the opening of the shaft, and his voice grew a little husky as he answered:

"Still we must get out as soon as we can, or they'll lock up the shaft. They've got us dead to rights, if they only knew it."

"Bathe your shins in this cool water," said Davis, as he discovered a puddle in the floor of the drift.

"It's not exactly the proper treatment for burns, but it's certainly soothing. Gee! I feel like one of those fellows who was put in the fiery furnace! I can taste smoke at! I'll bet those were the ruins of a Chinese laundry!"

"It tasted worse than that! I think it was an opium pint," laughed Duncan, and then they devoted themselves to dressing their injuries.

There was nothing to do but for one of them to sacrifice his shirt, so, after flipping up a cent, Davis peeled off a cotton garment, which left him arrayed in only aannel shirt and his leather breeches.

"We won't be able to make many more shifts," he said,

dubiously. "Wonder what the folks at home would say if they should see us now, Duncan?"

"They'd say a detective's lot was not a happy one, I guess," was the answer. "But I'll be happy, old man, if we ever bag Jesse James! I can't get over our having him bagged in that dugout yonder!"

"It was a close call for Jess, all right," was the answer, "and it would have been a last call for us, I guess, if he could have used that rifle at close quarters."

Hours passed, with the detectives sleeping, resting, talking and nursing their wounds, and it was nearly sundown before they felt able to ascend the ladder and do a little reconnoitering.

They had both done their best to walk several times before, but their ankles were too sensitive and their bodies too exhausted.

Whether the mule team and guard had visited the dugout or not, they did not know, but they both intended to find out before they left the Gulch, so, as soon as they were above ground, they started in that direction.

"Whew! It's a relief to get out without having a bullet in your skull!" said Davis, as he stepped out of the shaft. "That looks as though they had left us to our fate. Now, the question is, Have they left the boodle?"

They made their way carefully around the ruins, which were still smoking hot, and, reaching the street, crept back toward the dugout.

No deserted village ever looked more forlorn, for there were only two cabins and a few sheds left standing in the Gulch, and not a sign of human life was visible.

The natives of the Gulch had evidently betaken themselves to the next settlement, which was ten miles farther back in the foothills, and which was too poor in every way to offer any inducements for Jesse James and his gang to visit it.

Arriving at the dugout, the detectives found the tracks of the outlaws up to the very door, but nothing in the shape of a dead body was visible.

A smoldering bonfire a short distance away emitted such an odor of burning flesh that it was not difficult to guess what the fate of the victims had been, but even this was better than leaving them undisposed of, so they wasted no time in comments on this subject.

Davis stood guard while Duncan looked into the dugout, and reported that the boys were gone, and likewise the coffin.

"Curse our luck!" he said, disgustedly. "That robber has made a cool fifty thousand! He's probably half way to the railroad by this time; that is, if the people at the smelting works really think it's the sheriff's body."

"They'd know better if they attempted to lift the coffin, but, of course, Jess knows better than to let them do that! He'll probably pass his men off as Watts' gang, and no one will bother to dispute him."

"Unless that belated guard happens to run across them. They're liable to inspect everything they meet after the orders Watts sent them," said Davis, quickly. "He notified them that Jesse James was in this locality, and that is enough. They'd be sure to look into the arrival of the sheriff's body."

"Then we'll hope for the best. Now, the thing to do is to find shelter and something to eat. It's ten miles, at least, to a house of any description. Suppose we follow the track to the smelting works. It's easier walking, and

we can't lose our way. Besides, that's the way Miss Colchester has gone. She should be at the smelting works long before now."

"Did she tell you where you would be likely to find her?"

"Yes, at a place called Coe's. It's a bakeshop, I believe. She says there's a woman there who will give her protection. I am to ask at Coe's for Miss Abbie Milnor."

His companion was about to reply, when Duncan grabbed him by the arm and exclaimed:

"Good God, old man! If there isn't that engine! She's jumped the track! Quick! Shall we bolt, or go forward?"

They had been rounding a curve of the track as they spoke, and now stopped short, for, not thirty feet ahead of them, stood what was left of the engine.

She had evidently been handled carelessly, for she had jumped the track, and, turning over on her side, had spilled the coal from her tender.

Duncan took a sharp glance ahead, and then went limping along, with Davis at his heels, and not waiting for an answer.

"Hello! One of 'em has got his deserts!" cried Davis a minute later, as he saw one of the outlaws lying, face down, under the engine, with one of the wheels resting directly across his body.

"He must have jumped and tripped in some way. Well, he's as dead as they make 'em, so he can't tell any secrets. Now the thing to find out is what they have done with the treasure."

They glanced up and down the track, and even scouted around in the bushes, but the coffin, with its load of gold dust, was among the missing.

After wasting an hour, they decided to go on, and, at one o'clock in the morning, the tall chimneys of the smelting works were just visible in the cut between two mountains.

Realizing that they were near their journey's end, the two detectives crept into the bushes and dropped down exhausted, and, in spite of their burns, both slept soundly until morning.

When they finally reached the "works," the natives were just beginning to stir, and this story of the fire at the Gulch and Jesse James' daring deed seemed to come upon them like a clap of thunder.

"Thet thar engine should er been hyar at sunrise," said the manager of the "works," as he eyed them sharply. "So you're detectives, air yer, an' Jess is yer quarry?"

"That's right, but he has escaped us," said Davis, glumly, "and the worst of it is, we came here on purpose to help Watts protect his money. His brother, who lives in Chicago, paid the agency a big sum for sending us out."

"Waal, now, I wouldn't worry none," said the man, sympathetically. "There's better'n you who hev tried ter outwit Jess an' failed. Great snakes! Ter think of ther Gulch bein' wiped out completely! An' yer say Jess sot fire to it, jest ter cover his deviltry!"

This portion of the story seemed to interest him more than the other, but he did not forget to take the detectives to his hut, where they were promptly supplied with both comforts and necessities.

The doctor at the "works" called in, and, in spite

of the fact that his patients were mostly horses, he succeeded in improving the condition of their feet and legs considerably. It was out of the question to call on Miss Colchester that day, but the manager informed them that a young lady had come there on horseback at daybreak the day before, and had gone directly to Coe's, where she was warmly welcomed.

This relieved their minds greatly, and they were able to rest a little, but, as the night drew near, Duncan began to grow uneasy.

Not a word was heard either of the James gang or the guard with the mule team, and as there was no telegraph at the "works," they could not communicate with the Governor.

Finally Duncan had gotten himself into such a state of anxiety that his friend suggested something which caused a glow of happiness to promptly spread over his face.

It was nothing less than to inform Miss Colchester by note of the arrival of the two detectives.

Five minutes later the door flew open, and Miss Colchester and her friend, Abbie Milnor, rushed in.

Duncan forgot himself so completely that he rose and took a step forward, when a twinge in his ankle made him turn as pale as ashes.

In an instant Miss Colchester flew to his side, and, seizing his hand in hers, pushed him back, gently, on to the wooden settee.

"You are hurt! I see you have both suffered!" she cried, with her eyes upon his face. "Oh, I thought that night you had come to your doom! I could have screamed in agony when I first saw you in the home of that robber!"

"But you have been in his home for ten years," murmured Duncan, drawing her down beside him.

"Oh, but I have not been there all that time!" cried the young girl, while her cheeks reddened prettily. "Jess sent me to a convent in Canada, and I have lived there all the time. I had only been with Mrs. James a month when you met me that evening."

"Thank God! Still, in that little time, that ruffian, Mustang Mike, dared to make love to you!"

The young girl's head drooped, and she blushed harder than ever, as she answered:

"Yes, and Jess encouraged him, as you saw yourself. Oh, I will bless you all my life if you will restore me to my parents!"

"If the thing is possible it shall be done. I shall communicate both with the Governor and your father as soon as possible, but, meanwhile, my friend here, Mr. Davis — Hello! Where is he, anyway? He was here when you came in, but —"

"But, as the young lady didn't see him, he thought he might as well bolt," called a merry voice through the door, and then the two young people discovered, to their surprise, that they were the sole occupants of the manager's parlor.

"Don't go, Miss Colchester! Please, don't go!" whispered Duncan, holding the girl's other hand and pressing it tenderly. "Davis always was a considerate fellow, and—well, you see, he knew I had something that I wished to say to you, so you will stay, won't you?"

The young girl's face was scarlet now, but she did not attempt to withdraw her hand, and her bended head seemed to droop nearer to his shoulder.

"Listen, little girl! I fell in love with you the minute I saw you," whispered Duncan, putting one arm around her. "And, of course, I am going to restore you to your parents, and after that, darling, I want you to marry me."

There was no answer in the room, in spite of the fact that three people just outside of the rude board partition were waiting breathlessly for it, but at last there came a sound that seemed to be perfectly satisfactory.

"Thet thar settles ther hull biz! Ther gal's kissed him!" chuckled the manager, and the next minute Davis let out a war whoop and then went in to congratulate them.

CHAPTER XI.

AN EXCITING NIGHT.

During the following day the news from various quarters began to arrive, and the people at the "works" became thoroughly convinced of the veracity of the two detectives.

This was a great relief, inasmuch as it left them free to act according to their own judgment.

The fugitives from Coyote Gulch had gone back one by one and, being fully aware now of the cunning which Jesse James had used in order to steal the gold dust from under their very noses, their indignation knew no bounds, and there were dire threats of vengeance made against the outlaw.

The gulch was in ashes, but the men set about rebuilding, for the fire had been stopped by one of the tributaries of the Big Horn, only two miles away, and there was plenty of timber upon the opposite bank of the narrow stream, which could be floated across and carried to the Gulch. Further news was that the guard of United States soldiers, on its way to the Gulch, had met and battled with the outlaw gang in the mountains and discovered the coffin full of gold dust, which they promptly confiscated.

Only two of the ruffians were shot down, Jesse James escaping unhurt, and making straight for the heart of the mountains, on a horse which even his own men found trouble in following.

"That was Fleetwind, of course," was Duncan's prompt comment. "That is the finest specimen of horseflesh that I ever clapped my eyes on. I wonder where he got her?"

"Stole him in Missouri from a man named Pearsall," was the manager's answer. "You kin bet he never come by er critter like thet thar honestly."

"Then there'd be no harm in giving him the same game. I won't rest until I have that horse," said Davis, enthusiastically.

"She's been stolen before, but he always gits her back," was the answer. "I wouldn't bother about ther horse, gentlemen, but, ef yer ever git ther chance, steal ther outlaw an' bring him to ther 'works!' I'd take a hand myself in stringin' him up ter ther highest chimney."

"Jess bears a charmed life. He'll never be taken alive," spoke up the Milnor woman, who was present during the conversation. "I've known the outlaw for years, and I believe he's proof against bullets."

The manager had gone out while they spoke, but he now returned with an air about him that bespoke unusual activity.

"How soon do you chaps want to go back to the Red Cut Tavern for thet thar squaw?" he asked.

The manager referred to the Indian woman who had rendered the detectives such good service.

Davis and Duncan consulted, and decided they could go the next morning.

"Then I'll have horses and six men to escort you," was the reply. "And the Lord help Jesse James ef he falls inter ther clutches, fer six better men never pulled a trigger."

Miss Colchester watched them depart the next morning with considerable fear at her heart, but she was courageous enough not to show it in her features.

Two days elapsed before she heard from them again, but at the end of that time something happened that made her rapturously happy, for she received a message from her parents at Laramie City.

They could hardly believe that their daughter was alive, but were waiting with open arms to receive her whenever her brave deliverers should restore her to them.

Right on top of this good news came the detectives with the Indian woman, whom they had found in the cellar of the tavern, where she had been kept on bread and water.

Red Fox was not there, having, presumably, joined the outlaw band in the mountains, but the detectives had killed the fellow Jim, after making him reveal a few of the outlaws' secrets, and then they had set fire to the town and watched it burn to ashes.

Twenty-four hours later the little party set out for the railroad, the two women riding broncos as well as the men, and all armed to the teeth with knives and pistols.

Not a whisper of Jesse James' whereabouts had reached the "works," but the detectives seemed to "feel it in their bones" that he would not allow Miss Colchester to escape him so easily, so, as they rode along, their eyes scanned every rock and bush for some sign that would bespeak the robber's presence.

The dusk of the first day was falling when they dismounted from their tired beasts, and the eight men who composed the party started to find suitable sleeping places.

They had chosen a little hollow between two hills, where the soil was dry and the trees grew in clusters, which would afford protection from an enemy.

For an hour before the men had been taking a shot here and there, bringing down small animals and birds which they knew to be eatable, and now they built a fire of sticks and prepared to roast them, while the two women arranged a table, with only dead leaves for dishes.

Suddenly one of the men, who was plucking a bird, bent his head and listened, and in a second the rest of the party followed his example.

Away back in the hills they could hear a strange bird calling. It was a peculiar noise, half warble and half whistle.

"I'll be jiggered ef that ain't the queerest noise I ever heerd," said one. "Now what critter in these hyar mountains makes er yip like thet thar? 'Tain't neither bird nor beast, accordin' ter my judgin'."

"I reckon ye're right, Beade Slicer," said one of the others. "Thar ain't no bird with er whistle like thet, an', as fer er four-legged critter er tryin' ter warble—

waal, it's jest like er jackass er tryin' ter sing—they can't none on 'em do it!"

"Sh! Thar it goes ag'in', an' it's comin' nearer, by thunder! I move thet one on us goes up on ther two hills yonder and hez er look at thet thar unnatural critter."

"A good idea! Give us a signal if anything is wrong," said Duncan, quickly.

Two men mounted their horses promptly and started for the summits of the two hills, while Miss Colchester and the Indian woman crept behind the trees and drew their pistols in order to be in readiness.

Five minutes later the men came back.

They had neither seen nor heard anything more of the extraordinary creature, and the supper was eaten with great enjoyment.

When they were finally quiet for the night, with Beade Sliver acting as sentry, other curious noises greeted their ears, but, as they occasioned no comment, the detectives concluded that they were not out of the ordinary.

A fire was kept burning to keep off troublesome animals, but, being in the hollow between the hills, the men concluded that it could not serve as a signal to the outlaws unless they fairly stumbled upon them, in which case that would discover them, anyway.

Midnight passed, and the sentry, who had ridden hard all day, sat down on the ground to rest a minute.

The silence of the mountains must have cast a spell upon him, for in a second his head fell forward and his eyes closed, and he began snoring as soundly as any one of his companions.

Almost the first resounding snore awoke the Indian woman and, raising her head from her pillow of dry leaves, she listened intently.

Suddenly an ugly light flashed into her eyes, and she put her ear to the ground, holding it there until she heard distinctly the careful tread of horses.

They could not be more than forty rods away, which meant that they were coming from the hill and had seen the fire. In a second she was on her knees and shaking Duncan's shoulder.

"Sh! They come! Outlaws!" she whispered, shrilly.

Duncan rose like lightning and touched the others, and, without so much as a sound, each slid behind a tree, rubbing sleep from his eyes with one hand while he clutched a pistol in the other.

On the enemy came, the darkness of the incline hiding them completely. Then one of their horses gave a loud, clear whinny.

In an instant the sleeping broncos, which had been tethered among the trees, awoke with a start, and snort after snort disclosed their location to the enemy.

"We are discovered! There is nothing to do but fight for it now!" said Duncan, in a low voice. Then he added, even more softly:

"Don't be frightened, darling! That robber shall never get you in his clutches again! I swear it!"

"Save your own life, dearest! Don't mind me!" was the brave answer. Then a warning "Hush!" from the Indian woman terminated the conversation.

Whoever was advancing had come to a sudden halt, and once more the peculiar signal echoed through the darkness.

Duncan waited a second and then puckered up his lips.

At the very first trial he answered the signal perfectly. There was a profound silence after this, in which the party beneath the trees hardly breathed, they were so anxious to see how the rash venture would be taken.

A moment later another signal was given. This was a clever imitation of the barking of a coyote.

This was too much for Duncan's powers, but Beade Slicer came to his rescue, and the extraordinary signal was cleverly executed.

"Hang ther rascals! Ther're tryin' us ter see if we're friends or foes!" whispered one of the men to Duncan.

"Then answer every signal, if you can," was the quick answer. "If they think we are friends, they'll come on, and we may be able to take them at a disadvantage."

"Ef it's Jess, he's probably expectin' some of his gang ter j'ine him erbout hyar," muttered Slicer, just as the notes of a whippoorwill sounded clearly from the direction of the newcomers.

It was the Indian woman's turn to answer, and she did it cleverly; then, once more, there was a moment of suspense, in which every one's heart seemed to stop beating.

"Hello! Is that you, Fox?" called a cautious voice a minute later.

Whoever had spoken had taken pains to disguise his voice, but Duncan did not let this deter him from making another experiment.

He remembered the peculiar twang of Red Fox distinctly, and, imitating the drawl, he answered, promptly:

"Hello! Is thet thar you, Jess? Snakes! I'm glad ter find yer at last!"

"What the devil brought you over here, anyway?" asked the voice again, but this time there was no disguise, and the detectives recognized it as belonging to Jesse James himself.

Duncan's wits worked rapidly, and he let out a sort of chuckle as he answered:

"I reckon, now, I knowed erbout whar ye'd be, Jess. I heerd thet thar sleuth hed showed up at ther 'works,' an' thet ther gal wuz with him, an' where'd I reck'n they'd go, ef not fer the railroad? Yer'd be likely ter think thet thar same thing yerself, now, wouldn't yer, Jess? Ther fact that ye're hyar seems ter prove thet thar question."

"How'd you leave the tavern?" asked the outlaw, without coming any nearer and with a note in his voice which proved that he was trying to be cautious.

A genuine outlaw curse broke from Duncan's lips, and, continuing in Fox's tones, he answered, savagely:

"Ther tavern wuz burned to ther ground ther night ther gal was stole! Yer know thet thar well enough, Jess, without askin' me! What ther devil is ther matter with yer, anyway? Is it possible yer don't reckernize me?"

"It don't do to be too sure of anything these days," replied the outlaw, sourly.

Then there was an order given in a low voice, and the horses moved a little.

"Who've you got with you, Fox? I see figures in the trees," said the outlaw again.

Another curse emphasized his remarks as Duncan answered, tersely:

"They're hosses, Jess! Thar's eight on 'em in all. I un ercross er stranger jest back toward ther Pike level."

This last statement seemed more convincing than anything that had preceded it, for Jesse James urged his horse forward immediately, and his men seemed to follow him, while the little party behind the trees clutched their weapons and waited.

CHAPTER XII.

AT CLOSE RANGE.

Once more the outlaws halted just out of sight of the ambushed party, and a brief parley between Jesse James and his men followed.

The detectives listened eagerly, but they could not catch a word and, after a minute, a solitary rider could be seen peering through the darkness.

"Air yer stoppin', or goin' on, Jess?" asked Duncan, still in the assumed voice of Red Fox. "I'm pesky leg-weary, but I'll go on ef yer say so, but I'd like er leetle help with these hyar buckin' critters."

"Bring 'em out and let's have a look at 'em," said another voice, which, for some reason or other, was substituted for the first speaker's.

"When ther cap'n sez so, I will," grunted Duncan, stolidly. "I ain't takin' no orders from understrappers!"

He moved slightly as he spoke, so that he could get a clearer view of the foremost rider, and the next second, giving a sharp order, he aimed point blank at the fellow and snapped the trigger.

A volley of shots followed, for the horsemen were now in range of those hiding behind the trees, and, as Duncan slipped behind a rock, the wildest sort of stampede followed.

Yells, curses and groans showed that the outlaws had been hit, and it also showed that they were in ignorance of the force of their enemy.

After firing one volley, they turned their horses' heads and dug the spurs into their sides, and as they galloped back up the hill, Duncan issued a loud order:

"After them, men! Don't let the ruffian escape us this time! Hunt him to the death, and his whole gang with him!"

They were off in a minute, both men and women, and, their horses being somewhat rested, they gained rapidly on their quarry.

Crack!

Crack!

The outlaws' bullets flew over their heads as they mounted the hill, but they only bent low over their horses' necks and flew like the wind, reserving their fire until they got a little nearer.

As they reached the brow of the hill, the outlaws dashed down upon the other side, Jesse James so far in advance that he seemed to be outdistancing his men completely.

"Will nothing stop that horse, not even a bullet?" cried Duncan, raising his head and firing.

The bullet whizzed past the ear of one of the nearer

outlaws, and when it passed Jesse James he must have heard its singing, for he half rose in his saddle and returned the shot, the bullet cutting a furrow across the brim of Duncan's wide sombrero.

The sky was growing gray rapidly now, and the hills grew lighter, so that, as the bandit king glanced back over his shoulder, he could discern the two women.

Until that minute he had not been sure who his pursuers were, but now, seeing that his "ward" was among them, he knew it must be the detective, and in an instant the whole recklessness of his nature seemed to leap to the surface.

Calling his men to a halt on the very brow of the next hill, he bunched them together, then quietly waited for his pursuers to come up, fully expecting his superior position to give him a victory.

Duncan observed the manoeuvre, and his voice rang out instantly:

"Halt, men! Don't attempt to ascend that hill yet! It would be death to all of us! We must tire out the rascals!"

They halted instantly, just out of range, and taunting shouts from the outlaws were received in grim silence.

The night paled before the outlaws had altered their position, and, as their figures were dimly outlined against the sky, they made a startling picture.

There were only five of them in all, but of the number Jesse James could easily be picked out, not only by his magnificent horse, but by his own superb proportions. Frank James was also readily discernible, because of his likeness to his brother, but the rest were typical desperadoes, with no trace of anything uncommon in their bearing.

If the outlaws stayed much longer on the crest of the hill, it would be sure death for them, for when daylight came they could be easily picked off by their pursuers.

Sure enough, another glance up the hill showed that the enemy had at last abandoned its position.

"They're off at last!" shouted Davis.

"After them, then, and no quarter!" yelled Duncan, and once more there was a wild dash over rocks and bushes, the broncos seemingly entering into the wild spirit of the occasion.

Davis had just forged ahead, and Beade Slicer was beside him, when a sudden yell from the outlaws made them all look up in astonishment.

Once more the outlaw gang appeared upon the very brow of the hill, and in an instant their pistols set up a merry cracking.

"They've tricked us! Curse them! At them, men!" roared Duncan, and as he pressed his spurs into his horse, he emptied his weapon.

"Charge! All at once! Up and after them!" roared Davis, and once more the mountains echoed with the report of weapons.

On swept the dauntless band, the two women shoulder to shoulder with their protectors, and the outlaws' bullets singing like hail about their ears. Then came a cry of pain and one of the horses fell headlong. Then another went down, and then another.

They were almost on a level with their enemies now,

and this depletion in their ranks made the two sides equal, except that of the five on one side two were women.

"Now, let them have it!" yelled Duncan again, as his horse finally struck the level.

A volley followed, and three of the outlaws fell, but they were back on their horses in a second and making a wild rush for cover.

Jesse James and his brother stood a minute longer, each with a weapon in both hands, which they emptied coolly and calmly.

Four times Duncan felt the whiz of a bullet passing his ear, but at last his own horse went down and he was knocked insensible by being thrown head first against a stunted tree trunk.

What happened next no one could ever really tell, but Frank James pitched from his saddle and was caught by his brother before he fell; then the left arm of the famous outlaw dropped heavily by his side, and, turning like a flash, the two dashed into a grove of cedars.

No one followed the outlaws, because there seemed no one able to do so, inasmuch as not a loaded weapon remained in the party.

Davis and Miss Colchester were both at Duncan's side in a minute, while the Indian woman busied herself looking after the others.

It was a sorry party that finally reached the little station on the Northern Pacific and took passage by the first train for Laramie City.

Bead Slicer and two of his companions returned to the "works" alone, after being well rewarded for their services by the two detectives, but of the other three two remained at the station to recover from their wounds, while one had been buried near the spot where the outlaw's bullet reached him.

Duncan's head was so troublesome after his fall that he dared not continue his work, while the wound in his friend's arm had become so inflamed that he was obliged to rest to avoid amputation.

Miss Colchester's parents met them at the station, and half of Laramie City came a little later to welcome her.

The detectives were looked upon as heroes, and the paper which poor Barnes had left caused them bitter grief, which prompted the erection of a monument to his memory later.

The story of how Jesse James came to kidnap a poor man's daughter was told to the detectives later, and Jennie in turn told how the outlaw had treated her.

It seemed that the outlaw had mistaken her for the child of a millionaire in Laramie City when she was ten years old, picking her out of a bunch of school children and running away with her.

He hid her for a while, and, as there was no reward

offered, he investigated and learned his error, after which he did not dare restore the child, so he put her in a convent and defrayed the expenses of her education.

What he intended to do with her later no one could guess, but from his approval of Mustang Mike's suit it could easily be guessed that he intended to get rid of her by any means except murder.

The Indian nurse was also heaped with honors, for she was recognized immediately by Jennie's parents and neighbors.

Shortly after the child's abduction she had started off alone to find her, and for seven long years she had wandered from place to place wherever she had reason to think that Jesse James was carrying on his nefarious business.

John Watts' gold dust reached his brother at last, and the part that the detectives took in its capture was told to Mr. Pinkerton by Davis.

Duncan did not go back to Chicago for many months, and when he did it was only for a visit and to show his bride to his relatives.

As for Jesse James, he quitted Wyoming after that, but was soon heard of again in a different part of the country.

His wife was next seen with some friends in Missouri, so it was evident that she had been well protected by her husband.

Coyote Gulch was rebuilt and more gold was found in its mountains, but among its traditions is the memory of that night when Jesse James and his gang swept it out of existence.

THE END.

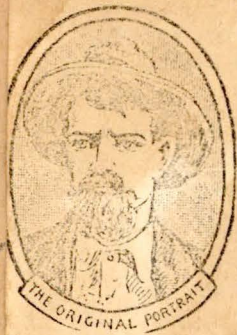
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